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POEMS

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POEMS

BY

JEAN INGELOW

BOSTON
ROBERTS BROTHERS
1865

AUTHOR'S EDITION.
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To

GEORGE K. INGELOW.

YOUR LOVING SISTER OFFERS YOU THESE POEMS, PARTLY AS AN EXPRESSION OF HER AFFECTION, PARTLY FOR THE PLEASURE OF CONNECTING HER EFFORTS WITH YOUR NAME.

Kensington, June 1863.

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POEMS.

DIVIDED.

I.

AN empty sky, a world of heather,
Purple of foxglove, yellow of broom;
We two among them wading together,
Shaking out honey, treading perfume.

Crowds of bees are giddy with clover,
Crowds of grasshoppers skip at our feet,
Crowds of larks at their matins hang over,
Thanking the Lord for a life so sweet.

Flusheth the rise with her purple favor,
Gloweth the cleft with her golden ring,
'Twixt the two brown butterflies waver,
Lightly settle, and sleepily swing.

We two walk till the purple dieth
And short dry grass under foot is brown,
But one little streak at a distance lieth
Green like a ribbon to prank the down.

II.

Over the grass we stepped unto it,
And God He knoweth how blithe we were!
Never a voice to bid us eschew it:
Hey the green ribbon that showed so fair!

Hey the green ribbon! we kneeled beside it,
We parted the grasses dewy and sheen;
Drop over drop there filtered and slided,
A tiny bright beck that trickled between.

Tinkle, tinkle, sweetly it sung to us,
Light was our talk as of faëry bells;
Faëry wedding-bells faintly rung to us
Down in their fortunate parallels.

Hand in hand, while the sun peered over,
We lapped the grass on that youngling spring;
Swept back its rushes, smoothed its clover,
And said, "Let us follow it westering."

III.

A dappled sky, a world of meadows,
Circling above us the black rooks fly
Forward, backward; lo their dark shadows
Flit on the blossoming tapestry.

Flit on the beck, for her long grass parteth
As hair from a maid's bright eyes blown back;
And, lo, the sun like a lover darteth
His flattering smile on her wayward track

Sing on! we sing in the glorious weather
Till one steps over the tiny strand,
So narrow, in sooth, that still together
On either brink we go hand in hand.

The beck grows wider, the hands must sever.
On either margin, our songs all done,
We move apart, while she singeth ever,
Taking the course of the stooping sun.

He prays, "Come over" — I may not follow;
I cry, "Return" — but he cannot come:
We speak, we laugh, but with voices hollow;
Our hands are hanging, our hearts are numb.

IV.

A breathing sigh, a sigh for answer,
A little talking of outward things;
The careless beck is a merry dancer,
Keeping sweet time to the air she sings.

A little pain when the beck grows wider;
"Cross to me now — for her wavelets swell:"
"I may not cross," — and the voice beside her
Faintly reacheth, though heeded well.

No backward path; ah! no returning;
No second crossing that ripple's flow:
"Come to me now, for the west is burning;
Come ere it darkens;" — "Ah, no! ah, no!"

Then cries of pain, and arms outreaching —
The beck grows wider and swift and deep:
Passionate words as of one beseeching —
The loud beck drowns them; we walk, and weep.

V.

A yellow moon in splendor drooping,
A tired queen with her state oppressed,
Low by rushes and swordgrass stooping,
Lies she soft on the waves at rest.

The desert heavens have felt her sadness;
Her earth will weep her some dewy tears;
The wild beck ends her tune of gladness,
And goeth stilly as soul that fears.

We two walk on in our grassy places
On either marge of the moonlit flood,
With the moon's own sadness in our faces,
Where joy is withered, blossom and bud.

VI.

A shady freshness, chafers whirring,
A little piping of leaf-hid birds;
A flutter of wings, a fitful stirring,
A cloud to the eastward snowy as curds.

Bare grassy slopes, where kids are tethered
Round valleys like nests all ferny-lined;
Round hills, with fluttering tree-tops feathered,
Swell high in their freckled robes behind.

A rose-flush tender, a thrill, a quiver,
When golden gleams to the tree-tops glide;
A flashing edge for the milk-white river,
The beck, a river — with still sleek tide.

Broad and white, and polished as silver
On she goes under fruit-laden trees;
Sunk in leafage cooeth the culver,
And 'plaineth of love's disloyalties.

Glitters the dew and shines the river,
Up comes the lily and dries her bell;
But two are walking apart forever,
And wave their hands for a mute farewell.

VII.

A braver swell, a swifter sliding;
The river hasteth, her banks recede.
Wing-like sails on her bosom gliding
Bear down the lily and drown the reed.

Stately prows are rising and bowing
(Shouts of mariners winnow the air),
And level sands for banks endowing
The tiny green ribbon that showed so fair.

While, O my heart! as white sails shiver,
And crowds are passing, and banks stretch wide,
How hard to follow, with lips that quiver,
That moving speck on the far-off side.

Farther, farther — I see it — know it —
My eyes brim over, it melts away:
Only my heart to my heart shall show it
As I walk desolate day by day.

VIII.

And yet I know past all doubting, truly —
A knowledge greater than grief can dim —
I know, as he loved, he will love me duly —
Yea better — e'en better than I love him.

And as I walk by the vast calm river,
The awful river so dread to see,
I say, "Thy breadth and thy depth forever
Are bridged by his thoughts that cross to me."

HONORS. — PART I.

(*A Scholar is musing on his want of success.*)

TO strive — and fail. Yes, I did strive and fail,
I set mine eyes upon a certain night
To find a certain star — and could not hail
With them its deep-set light.

Fool that I was! I will rehearse my fault:
I, wingless, thought myself on high to lift
Among the winged — I set these feet that halt
To run against the swift.

And yet this man, that loved me so, can write —
That loves me, I would say, can let me see;
Or fain would have me think he counts but light
These Honors lost to me.

(*The letter of his friend.*)

"What are they? that old house of yours which gave
Such welcomes oft to me, the sunbeams fall
Still, down the squares of blue and white which pave
Its hospitable hall.

"A brave old house! a garden full of bees,
Large dropping poppies, and Queen hollyhocks,
With butterflies for crowns — tree peonies
And pinks and goldilocks.

"Go, when the shadow of your house is long
Upon the garden — when some new-waked bird,
Pecking and fluttering, chirps a sudden song,
And not a leaf is stirred;

"But every one drops dew from either edge
Upon its fellow, while an amber ray
Slants up among the tree-tops like a wedge
Of liquid gold — to play

"Over and under them, and so to fall
Upon that lane of water lying below —
That piece of sky let in, that you do call
A pond, but which I know

"To be a deep and wondrous world; for I
Have seen the trees within it — marvellous things!
So thick no bird betwixt their leaves could fly
But she would smite her wings; —

"Go there, I say; stand at the water's brink,
And shoals of spotted barbel you shall see
Basking between the shadows — look, and think
'This beauty is for me;

" ' For me this freshness in the morning hours,
For me the water's clear tranquillity ;
For me the soft descent of chestnut flowers ;
The cushat's cry for me.

" ' The lovely laughter of the wind-swayed wheat ;
The easy slope of yonder pastoral hill ;
The sedgy brook whereby the red kine meet
And wade and drink their fill.'

" Then saunter down that terrace whence the sea
All fair with wing-like sails you may discern ;
Be glad, and say ' This beauty is for me —
A thing to love and learn.

" ' For me the bounding in of tides ; for me
The laying bare of sands when they retreat ;
The purple flush of calms, the sparkling glee
When waves and sunshine meet.'

" So after gazing, homeward turn, and mount
To that long chamber in the roof ; there tell
Your heart the laid-up lore it holds to count
And prize and ponder well.

" The lookings onward of the race before
It had a past to make it look behind ;
Its reverent wonders, and its doubtings sore,
Its adorations blind.

"The thunder of its war-songs, and the glow
Of chants to freedom by the old world sung;
The sweet love cadences that long ago
Dropped from the old-world tongue.

"And then this new-world lore that takes account
Of tangled star-dust; maps the triple whirl
Of blue and red, and argent worlds that mount
And greet the IRISH EARL;

"Or float across the tube that HERSCHEL sways,
Like pale-rose chaplets, or like sapphire mist;
Or hang or droop along the heavenly ways,
Like scarves of amethyst.

"O strange it is and wide the new-world lore,
For next it treateth of our native dust!
Must dig out buried monsters, and explore
The green earth's fruitful crust;

"Must write the story of her seething youth —
How lizards paddled in her lukewarm seas;
Must show the cones she ripened, and forsooth
Count seasons on her trees;

"Must know her weight, and pry into her age,
Count her old beach lines by their tidal swell;
Her sunken mountains name, her craters gauge,
Her cold volcanoes tell;

"And treat her as a ball, that one might pass
From this hand to the other — such a ball
As he could measure with a blade of grass,
And say it was but small!

"Honors! O friend, I pray you bear with me:
The grass hath time to grow in meadow lands,
And leisurely the opal murmuring sea
Breaks on her yellow sands;

"And leisurely the ring-dove on her nest
Broods till her tender chick will peck the shell;
And leisurely down fall from ferny crest,
The dew-drops on the well;

"And leisurely your life and spirit grew,
With yet the time to grow and ripen free:
No judgment past withdraws that boon from you,
Nor granteth it to me.

"Still must I plod, and still in cities moil;
From precious leisure, learned leisure far,
Dull my best self with handling common soil;
Yet mine those honors are.

"Mine they are called; they are a name which mea
'This man had steady pulses, tranquil nerves;
Here, as in other fields, the most he gleans
Who works and never swerves.

"'We measure not his mind; we cannot tell
What lieth under, over, or beside
The test we put him to; he doth excel,
We know, where he is tried;

'But, if he boast some farther excellence —
Mind to create as well as to attain;
To sway his peers by golden eloquence,
As wind doth shift a fane;

"'To sing among the poets — we are nought:
We cannot drop a line into that sea
And read its fathoms off, nor gauge a thought,
Nor map a simile.

"'It may be of all voices sublunar
The only one he echoes we did try;
We may have come upon the only star
That twinkles in his sky.'

"And so it was with me."
O false my friend!
False, false, a random charge, a blame undue;
Wrest not fair reasoning to a crooked end:
False, false, as you are true!

But I read on: "And so it was with me;
Your golden constellations lying apart
They neither hailed nor greeted heartily,
Nor noted on their chart.

"And yet to you and not to me belong
Those finer instincts that, like second sight
And hearing, catch creation's undersong,
And see by inner light.

"You are a well, whereon I, gazing, see
Reflections of the upper heavens — a well
From whence come deep, deep echoes up to me —
Some under wave's low swell.

"I cannot soar into the heights you show,
Nor dive among the deeps that you reveal;
But it is much that high things are to know,
That deep things are to feel.

"'T is yours, not mine, to pluck out of your breast
Some human truth, whose workings recondite
Were unattired in words, and manifest
And hold it forth to light;

"And cry, 'Behold this thing that I have found.'
And though they knew not of it till that day,
Nor should have done with no man to expound
Its meaning, yet they say,

"'We do accept it: lower than the shoals
We skim this diver went, nor did create,
But find it for us deeper in our souls
Than we can penetrate.'

"You were to me the world's interpreter,
The man that taught me Nature's unknown tongue,
And to the notes of her wild dulcimer
First set sweet words, and sung.

"And what am I to you? A steady hand
To hold, a steadfast heart to trust withal;
Merely a man that loves you, and will stand
By you, whate'er befall.

"But need we praise his tendance tutelar
Who feeds a flame that warms him? Yet 't is true
I love you for the sake of what you are,
And not of what you do.

"As heaven's high twins, whereof in Tyrian blue
The one revolveth, through his course immense
Might love his fellow of the damask hue,
For like, and difference.

"For different pathways evermore decreed
To intersect, but not to interfere;
For common goal, two aspects, and one speed,
One centre and one year;

"For deep affinities, for drawings strong,
That by their nature each must needs exert;
For loved alliance, and for union long,
That stands before desert.

"And yet desert makes brighter not the less,
For nearest his own star he shall not fail
To think those rays unmatched for nobleness,
That distance counts but pale.

"Be pale afar, since still to me you shine,
And must while Nature's eldest law shall hold;"—
Ah, there's the thought which makes his random line
Dear as refinèd gold!

Then shall I drink this draft of oxymel,
Part sweet, part sharp? Myself o'erprized to know
Is sharp; the cause is sweet, and truth to tell
Few would that cause forego.

Which is that this of all the men on earth
Doth love me well enough to count me great —
To think my soul and his of equal girth?
O liberal estimate!

And yet it is so; he is bound to me,
For human love makes aliens near of kin;
By it I rise, there is equality:
I rise to thee, my twin.

"Take courage" — courage! aye, my purple peer,
I will take courage; for thy Tyrian rays
Refresh me to the heart, and strangely dear
And healing is thy praise.

"Take courage," quoth he, "and respect the mind
Your Maker gave, for good your fate fulfil;
The fate round many hearts your own to wind."
Twin soul, I will! I will!

HONORS. — PART II.

(*The Answer.*)

AS one who, journeying, checks the rein in haste
Because a chasm doth yawn across his way
Too wide for leaping, and too steeply faced
For climber to essay —

As such an one, being brought to sudden stand,
Doubts all his foregone path if 't were the true,
And turns to this and then to the other hand
As knowing not what to do, —

So I, being checked, am with my path at strife
Which led to such a chasm, and there doth end.
False path! it cost me priceless years of life,
My well-beloved friend.

There fell a flute when Ganymede went up —
The flute that he was wont to play upon:
It dropped beside the jonquil's milk-white cup,
And freckled cowslips wan.

Dropped from his heedless hand when dazed and mute,
He sailed upon the eagle's quivering wing,
Aspiring, panting — aye, it dropped — the flute
Erewhile a cherished thing.

Among the delicate grasses and the bells
Of crocuses that spotted a rill side,
I picked up such a flute, and its clear swells
To my young lips replied.

I played thereon, and its response was sweet;
But lo, they took from me that solacing reed.
"O shame!" they said; "such music is not meet;
Go up like Ganymede."

Go up, despise these humble grassy things,
Sit on the golden edge of yonder cloud.
Alas! though ne'er for me those eagle wings
Stooped from their eyry proud.

My flute! and flung away its echo's sleep;
But as for me, my life-pulse beateth low;
And, like a last-year's leaf enshrouded deep
Under the drifting snow,

Or like some vessel wrecked upon the sand,
Of torrid swamps, with all her merchandise,
And left to rot betwixt the sea and land,
My helpless spirit lies.

Ruing, I think for what then was I made;
What end appointed for — what use designed?
Now let me right this heart that was bewrayed —
Unveil these eyes gone blind.

My well-beloved friend, at noon to-day
Over our cliffs a white mist lay unfurled,
So thick, one standing on their brink might say
Lo, here doth end the world.

A white abyss beneath, and nought beside;
Yet, hark! a cropping sound not ten feet down,
Soon I could trace some browsing lambs that hied
Through rock-paths cleft and brown.

And here and there green tufts of grass peered through
Salt lavender and sea thrift; then behold
The mist subsiding ever, bared to view
A beast of giant mould.

She seemed a great sea-monster lying at ease
With all her cubs about her: but deep — deep —
The subtle mist went floating; its descent
Showed the world's end was steep.

It shook, it melted, shaking more, till, lo,
The sprawling monster was a rock, her brood
Were boulders, whereon sea-mews white as snow
Sat watching for their food.

Then once again it sank, its day was done:
Part rolled away, part vanished utterly;
And, glimmering softly under the white sun,
Behold! a great white sea.

O that the mist which veileth my To come
Would so dissolve and yield unto mine eyes
A worthy path! I 'd count not wearisome
Long toil, nor enterprise,

But strain to reach it; aye, with wrestlings stout
And hopes that even in the dark will grow
(Like plants in dungeons, reaching feelers out),
And ploddings wary and slow.

Is there such path already made to fit
The measure of my foot? it shall atone
For much, if I at length may light on it
And know it for mine own.

But is there none? why, then, 't is more than well:
And glad at heart myself will hew one out,
Let me be only sure; forsooth to tell
The sorest dole is doubt —

Doubt, a blank twilight of the heart, which mars
All sweetest colors in its dimness same;
A soul-mist, through whose rifts familiar stars
Beholding, we misname.

A ripple on the inner sea, which shakes
Those images that on its breast reposed;
A fold upon a wind-swayed flag, that breaks
The motto it disclosed.

O doubt! O doubt! I know my destiny;
I feel thee fluttering bird-like in my breast;
I cannot loose, but I will sing to thee,
And flatter thee to rest.

There is no certainty, "my bosom's guest,"
No proving for the things whereof ye wot;
For, like the dead to sight unmanifest,
They are, and they are not.

But surely as they are, for God is truth,
And as they are not, for we saw them die,
So surely from the heaven drops light for youth.
If youth will walk thereby.

And can I see this light? It may be so;
"But see it thus and thus," my fathers said.
The living do not rule this world; ah no!
It is the dead, the dead.

Shall I be slave to every noble soul,
Study the dead, and to their spirits bend;
Or learn to read my own heart's folded scroll,
And make self-rule my end?

Thought from without — O shall I take on trust,
And life from others modelled steal or win;
Or shall I heave to light, and clear of rust
My true life from within?

O, let me be myself! But where, oh where
Under this heap of precedent, this mound
Of customs, modes, and maxims, cumbrance rare,
Shall the Myself be found?

O thou *Myself*, thy fathers thee debarred
None of their wisdom, but their folly came
Therewith; they smoothed thy path, but made it hard
For thee to quit the same.

With glosses they obscured God's natural truth,
And with tradition tarnished His revealed;
With vain protections they endangered youth,
With layings bare they sealed.

What aileth thee, myself? Alas! thy hands
Are tied with old opinions — heir and son;
Thou hast inherited thy father's lands
And all his debts thereon.

O that some power would give me Adam's eyes,
O for the straight simplicity of Eve!
For I see nought, or grow, poor fool, too wise
With seeing to believe.

Exemplars may be heaped until they hide
The rules that they were made to render plain;
Love may be watched her nature to decide,
Until love's self doth wane.

Ah me! and when forgotten and foregone
We leave the learning of departed days,
And cease the generations past to con
Their wisdom and their ways,

When fain to learn we lean into the dark —
And grope to feel the floor of the abyss;
Or find the secret boundary lines which mark
Where soul and matter kiss —

Fair world! these puzzled souls of ours grow weak
With beating their bruised wings against the rim
That bounds their utmost flying, when they seek
The distant and the dim.

We pant, we strain like birds against their wires;
Are sick to reach the vast and the beyond; —
And what avails, if still to our desires
Those far-off gulfs respond?

Contentment comes not therefore; still there lies
An outer distance when the first is hailed,
And still forever yawns before our eyes
An UTMOST — that is veiled.

Searching those edges of the universe,
We leave the central fields a fallow part;
To feed the eye more precious things amerce,
And starve the darkened heart.

Then all goes wrong: the old foundations rock;
One scorns at him of old who gazed unshod;
One striking with a pickaxe thinks the shock
Shall move the seat of God.

A little way, a very little way
(Life is so short), they dig into the rind,
And they are very sorry, so they say, —
Sorry for what they find.

But truth is sacred — aye, and must be told:
There is a story long beloved of man;
We must forego it, for it will not hold —
Nature had no such plan.

And then, if "God hath said it," some should cry,
We have the story from the fountain-head:
Why, then, what better than the old reply,
The first "Yea HATH God said?"

The garden, O the garden, must it go,
Source of our hope and our most dear regret?
The ancient story, must it no more show
How man may win it yet?

And all upon the Titan child's decree,
The baby science, born but yesterday,
That in its rash unlearned infancy
With shells and stones at play,

And delving in the outworks of this world,
And little crevices that it could reach,
Discovered certain bones laid up, and furled
Under an ancient beach.

And other waifs that lay to its young mind
Some fathoms lower than they ought to lie,
By gain whereof it could not fail to find
Much proof of ancientry.

Hints at a Pedigree withdrawn and vast,
Terrible deeps, and old obscurities,
Or soulless origin, and twilight passed
In the primeval seas.

Whereof it tells, as thinking it hath been
Of truth not meant for man inheritor;
As if this knowledge heaven had ne'er foreseen
And not provided for.

Knowledge ordained to live! although the fate
Of much that went before it was — to die;
And be called ignorance by such as wait
Till the next drift comes by.

O marvellous credulity of man!
If God indeed kept secret, couldst thou know,
Or follow up the mighty Artisan
Unless He willed it so?

And canst thou of the Maker think in sooth
That of the Made he shall be found at fault,
And dream of wresting from Him hidden truth
By force or by assault?

But if He keeps not secret — if thine eyes
He openeth to His wondrous work of late —
Think how in soberness thy wisdom lies,
And have the grace to wait.

Wait, nor against the half-learned lesson fret,
Nor chide at old belief as if it erred,
Because thou canst not reconcile as yet
The worker and the word.

Either the worker did in ancient days
Give us the word, his tale of love and might;
And if in truth He gave it us, who says
He did not give it right?

Or else He gave it not, and then indeed
We know not if HE IS — by whom our years
Are portioned, who the orphan moons doth lead,
And the unfather'd spheres.

We sit unowned upon our burial sod,
And know not whence we come or whose we be,
Comfortless mourners for the mount of God,
The rocks of Calvary.

Bereft of heaven, and of the long-loved page
Wrought us by some who thought with death to cope;
Despairing comforters, from age to age
Sowing the seeds of hope.

Gracious deceivers, who have lifted us
Out of the slough where passed our unknown youth;
Beneficent liars, who have gifted us
With sacred love of truth.

Farewell to them: yet pause ere thou unmoor
And set thine ark adrift on unknown seas.
How wert thou bettered so, or more secure
Thou, and thy destinies?

And if thou searchest, and art made to fear
Facing of unread riddles dark and hard,
And mastering not their majesty austere,
Their meaning locked and barred:

How would it make the weight and wonder less,
If lifted from immortal shoulders down
The worlds were cast on seas of emptiness,
In realms without a crown!

And (if there were no God) were left to rue
  Dominion of the air and of the fire;
Then if there be a God, "Let God be true,
    And every man a liar."

But as for me, I do not speak as one
  That is exempt: I am with life at feud;
My heart reproacheth me, as there were none
    Of so small gratitude.

Wherewith shall I console thee, heart o' mine,
  And still thy yearning and resolve thy doubt?
That which I know, and that which I divine,
    Alas! have left thee out.

I have aspired to know the might of God,
  As if the story of His love was furled,
Nor sacred foot the grasses e'er had trod
    Of this redeemèd world.

Have sunk my thoughts as lead into the deep,
  To grope for that abyss whence evil grew,
And spirits of ill, with eyes that cannot weep,
    Hungry and desolate flew.

As if their legions did not one day crowd
  The death-pangs of the Conquering Good to see;
As if a sacred head had never bowed
    In death for man — for me.

Nor ransomed back the souls beloved, the sons
Of men, from thraldom with the nether kings
In that dark country where those evil ones
Trail their unhallowed wings.

And didst thou love the race that loved not thee,
And didst thou take to heaven a human brow?
Dost plead with man's voice by the marvellous sea
Art thou his kinsman now?

O God, O kinsman loved, but not enough!
O man, with eyes majestic after death,
Whose feet have toiled along our pathways rough,
Whose lips drawn human breath!

By that one likeness which is ours and thine,
By that one nature which doth hold us kin,
By that high heaven where, sinless, thou dost shine
To draw us sinners in,

By Thy last silence in the judgment-hall,
By long foreknowledge of the deadly tree,
By darkness, by the wormwood and the gall,
I pray Thee visit me.

Come, lest this heart should, cold and cast away,
Die ere the guest adored she entertain —
Lest eyes which never saw Thine earthly day
Should miss Thy heavenly reign.

Come, weary-eyed from seeking in the night
Thy wanderers strayed upon the pathless wold,
Who wounded, dying, cry to Thee for light,
And cannot find their fold.

And deign, O watcher, with the sleepless brow,
Pathetic in its yearning — deign reply:
Is there, O is there aught that such as Thou
Wouldst take from such as I?

Are there no briers across Thy pathway thrust,
Are there no thorns that compass it about?
Nor any stones that Thou wilt deign to trust
My hands to gather out?

O if Thou wilt, and if such bliss might be,
It were a cure for doubt, regret, delay —
Let my lost pathway go — what aileth me? —
There is a better way.

What though unmarked the happy workman toil,
And break unthanked of man the stubborn clod?
It is enough, for sacred is the soil,
Dear are the hills of God.

Far better in its place the lowliest bird
Should sing aright to Him the lowliest song,
Than that a seraph strayed should take the word
And sing His glory wrong.

Friend, it is time to work. I say to thee,
Thou dost all earthly good by much excel;
Thou and God's blessing are enough for me:
My work — my work, farewell!

REQUIESCAT IN PACE.

MY heart, my heart is sick awishing and awaiting:
The lad took up his knapsack, he went, he went his way;
And I looked on for his coming, as a prisoner through the grating
Looks and longs and longs and wishes for its opening day.

On the wild purple mountains, all alone with no other,
The strong terrible mountains he longed, he longed to be;
And he stooped to kiss his father, and he stooped to kiss his mother,
And till I said, "Adieu, sweet Sir," he quite forgot me.

He wrote of their white raiment, the ghostly capes that screen them,
Of the storm-winds that beat them, their thunder-rents and scars,
And the paradise of purple, and the golden slopes atween them,
And fields, where grow God's gentian bells, and his crocus stars.

He wrote of frail gauzy clouds, that drop on them like fleeces,
And make green their fir forests, and feed their mosses hoar;
Or come sailing up the valleys, and get wrecked and go to pieces,
Like sloops against their cruel strength: then he wrote no more.

O! the silence that came next, the patience and long aching;
They never said so much as "He was a dear loved son;"
Not the father to the mother moaned that dreary stillness breaking:
"Ah! wherefore did he leave so — this, our only one."

They sat within, as waiting, until the neighbors prayed them,
At Cromer, by the sea-coast, 't were peace and change to be;
And to Cromer, in their patience, or that urgency affrayed them,
Or because the tidings tarried, they came, and took me.

It was three months and over since the dear lad had started:
On the green downs at Cromer I sat to see the view;

On an open space of herbage, where the ling and fern had parted,
Betwixt the tall white lighthouse towers, the old and the new.

Below me lay the wide sea, the scarlet sun was stooping,
And he dyed the waste water, as with a scarlet dye;
And he dyed the lighthouse towers, every bird with white wing swooping,
Took his colors, and the cliffs did, and the yawning sky.

Over grass came that strange flush, and over ling and heather,
Over flocks of sheep and lambs, and over Cromer town;
And each filmy cloudlet crossing drifted like a scarlet feather
Torn from the folded wings of clouds, while he settled down.

When I looked, I dared not sigh: — In the light of God's splendor,
With his daily blue and gold, who am I? what am I.
But that passion and outpouring seemed an awful sign and tender,
Like the blood of the Redeemer, shown on earth and sky.

O for comfort, O the waste of a long doubt and trouble!
On that sultry August eve trouble had made me meek;
I was tired of my sorrow; O so faint, for it was double
In the weight of its oppression, that I could not speak!

And a little comfort grew, while the dimmed eyes were feeding,
And the dull ears with murmur of water satisfied;
But a dream came slowly nigh me, all my thoughts and fancy leading
Across the bounds of waking life to the other side.

And I dreamt that I looked out, to the waste waters turning,
And saw the flakes of scarlet from wave to wave tossed on;
And the scarlet mix with azure, where a heap of gold lay burning
On the clear remote sea reaches; for the sun was gone.

Then I thought a far-off shout dropped across the still water —
A question as I took it, for soon an answer came
From the tall white ruined lighthouse: "If it be the old man's daughter
That we wot of," ran the answer, "what then — who's to blame?"

I looked up at the lighthouse all roofless and storm-broken,
A great white bird sat on it, with neck stretched out to sea;
Unto somewhat which was sailing in a skiff the bird had spoken,
And a trembling seized my spirit; for they talked of me.

I was the old man's daughter, the bird went on to name him;
"He loved to count the starlings as he sat in the sun;
Long ago he served with Nelson, and his story did not shame him:
Ay, the old man was a good man — and his work was done."

The skiff was like a crescent, ghost of some moon departed,
Frail, white, she rocked and courtesied as the red wave she crossed,
And the thing within sat paddling, and the crescent dipped and darted,
Flying on, again was shouting, but the words were lost.

I said, "That thing is hooded;" I could hear, but that floweth
The great hood below its mouth: then the bird made reply,

"If they know not, more's the pity, for the little shrew-mouse knoweth,
And the kite knows, and the eagle, and the glead and pye."

And he stooped to whet his beak on the stones of the coping;
And when once more the shout came, in querulous tones, he spake,
"What I said was 'more's the pity;' if the heart be long past hoping,
Let it say of death, 'I know it,' or doubt on and break.

"Men must die — one dies by day, and near him moans his mother,
They dig his grave, tread it down, and go from it full loath:
And one dies about the midnight, and the wind moans, and no other,
And the snows give him a burial — and God loves them both.

"The first hath no advantage — it shall not soothe his slumber
That a lock of his brown hair his father ay shall keep;
For the last, he nothing grudgeth, it shall nought his quiet cumber,
That in a golden mesh of HIS callow eaglets sleep.

"Men must die when all is said, e'en the kite and glead know it,
And the lad's father knew it, and the lad, the lad too;
It was never kept a secret, waters bring it and winds blow it,
And he met it on the mountain — why then make ado?"

With that he spread his white wings, and swept across the water,
Lit upon the hooded head, and it and all went down;
And they laughed as they went under, and I woke, the old man's daughter,
And looked across the slope of grass, and at Cromer town.

And I said, "Is that the sky, all gray and silver-suited?"
And I thought, "Is that the sea that lies so white and wan?"
I have dreamed as I remember, give me time — I was reputed
Once to have a steady courage — O, I fear 'tis gone!

And I said, "Is this my heart? if it be, low 'tis beating,
So he lies on the mountain, hard by the eagles' brood;
I have had a dream this evening, while the white and gold were fleeting,
But I need not, need not tell it, where would be the good?

"Where would be the good to them, his father and his mother,
For the ghost of their dead hope appeareth to them still;
While a lonely watch-fire smoulders, who its dying red would smother?
That gives what little light there is to a darksome hill."

I rose up, I made no moan, I did not cry nor falter,
But slowly in the twilight I came to Cromer town.
What can wringing of the hands do that which is ordained to alter?
He had climbed, had climbed the mountain, he would ne'er come down.

But, O my first, O my best, I could not choose but love thee,
O, to be a wild white bird, and seek thy rocky bed!
From my breast I'd give thee burial, pluck the down and spread above thee;
I would sit and sing thy requiem on the mountain-head.

Fare thee well, my love of loves! would I had died before thee:
O, to be at least a cloud, that near thee I might flow!
Solemnly approach the mountain, weep away my being o'er thee,
And veil thy breast with icicles, and thy brow with snow!

SUPPER AT THE MILL.

Mother.

WELL, Frances.

Frances.

Well, good mother, how are you?

M. I'm hearty, lass, but warm; the weather's warm:
I think 'tis mostly warm on market-days.
I met with George behind the mill: said he,
"Mother, go in and rest a while."

F. Ay, do,
And stay to supper; put your basket down.

M. Why, now, it is not heavy?

F. Willie, man,
Get up and kiss your Granny. Heavy, no,
Some call good churning luck; but, luck or skill,
Your butter mostly comes as firm and sweet
As if 'twas Christmas. So you sold it all.

M. All but this pat that I put by for George;
He always loved my butter.

F. That he did.

M. And has your speckled hen brought off her brood?

F. Not yet; but that old duck I told you of,
She hatched eleven out of twelve to-day.

Child. And, Granny, they're so yellow.

M. Ay, my lad,
Yellow as gold — yellow as Willie's hair.

C. They're all mine, Granny, father says they're mine.

M. To think of that!

F. Yes, Granny, only think!
Why father means to sell them when they're fat,
And put the money in the savings-bank,
And all against our Willie goes to school:
But Willie would not touch them — no, not he;
He knows that father would be angry else.

C. But I want one to play with — O, I want
A little yellow duck to take to bed!

M. What! would ye rob the poor old mother, then?

F. Now, Granny, if you'll hold the babe a while;
'Tis time I took up Willie to his crib.

[*Exit* FRANCES.

[*Mother sings to the infant.*]

Playing on the virginals,
Who but I! Sae glad, sae free,
Smelling for all cordials,
The green mint and marjorie;
Set among the budding broom,
Kingcup and daffodilly;
By my side I made him room:
O love my Willie!

"Like me, love me, girl o' gowd,"
Sang he to my nimble strain,
Sweet his ruddy lips o'erflowed
Till my heartstrings rang again;

By the broom, the bonny broom,
  Kingcup and daffodilly;
In my heart I made him room:
  O love my Willie!

"Pipe and play, dear heart," sang he,
  "I must go, yet pipe and play;
Soon I'll come and ask of thee
  For an answer yea or nay;"
And I waited till the flocks
  Panted in yon waters stilly,
And the corn stood in the shocks:
  O love my Willie!

I thought first when thou didst come
  I would wear the ring for thee,
But the year told out its sum,
  Ere again thou sat'st by me;
Thou hadst nought to ask that day
  By kingcup and daffodilly;
I said neither yea nor nay:
  O love my Willie!

Enter GEORGE.

George. Well, mother, 'tis a fortnight now, or more,
Since I set eyes on you.

M. Ay, George, my dear,
I reckon you've been busy: so have we.

G. And how does father?

M. He gets through his work,
But he grows stiff, a little stiff, my dear;
He's not so young, you know, by twenty years

As I am — not so young by twenty years,
And I'm past sixty.

G. Yet he's hale and stout,
And seems to take a pleasure in his pipe;
And seems to take a pleasure in his cows,
And a pride, too.

M. And well he may, my dear.

G. Give me the little one, he tires your arm;
He's such a kicking, crowing, wakeful rogue,
He almost wears our lives out with his noise
Just at day-dawning, when we wish to sleep.
What! you young villain, would you clench your fist
In father's curls? a dusty father, sure,
And you're as clean as wax.
Ay, you may laugh,
But if you live a seven years more or so
These hands of yours will all be brown and scratched
With climbing after nest-eggs. They'll go down
As many rat-holes as are round the mere;
And you'll love mud, all manner of mud and dirt,
As your father did afore you, and you'll wade
After young water-birds; and you'll get bogged
Setting of eel-traps, and you'll spoil your clothes,
And come home torn and dripping: then, you know,
You'll feel the stick — you'll feel the stick, my lad!

Enter FRANCES.

F. You should not talk so to the blessed babe —

How can you, George! why he may be in heaven
Before the time you tell of.

M. Look at him:
So earnest, such an eager pair of eyes!
He thrives, my dear.

F. Yes, that he does, thank God!
My children are all strong.

M. 'Tis much to say;
Sick children fret their mother's hearts to shreds
And do no credit to their keep nor care.
Where is your little lass?

F. Your daughter came
And begged her of us for a week or so.

M. Well, well, she might be wiser, that she might;
For she can sit at ease and pay her way;
A sober husband, too — a cheerful man —
Honest as ever stepped, and fond of her;
Yet she is never easy, never glad,
Because she has not children. Well-a-day!
If she could know how hard her mother worked,
And what ado I had, and what a moil
With my half dozen! Children, ay forsooth,
They bring their own love with them when they come,
But if they come not there is peace and rest;
The pretty lambs! and yet she cries for more:
Why the world's full of them, and so is heaven —
They are not rare.

G. No, mother, not at all;

But Hannah must not keep our Fanny long —
She spoils her.

M. Ah! folks spoil their children now;
When I was a young woman 'twas not so:
We made our children fear us, made them work,
Kept them in order.

G. Were not proud of them —
Eh, mother?

M. I set store by mine, 'tis true,
But then I had good cause.

G. My lad, d'ye hear?
Your Granny was not proud, by no means proud!
She never spoilt your father — no, not she,
Nor ever made him sing at harvest-home,
Nor at the forge, nor at the baker's shop,
Nor to the doctor while she lay abed
Sick, and he crept up-stairs to share her broth.

M. Well, well, you were my youngest; and, what's more,
Your father loved to hear you sing — he did,
Although, good man, he could not tell one tune
From the other.

F. No, he got his voice from you:
Do use it, George, and send the child to sleep.

G. What must I sing?

F. The ballad of the man
That is so shy he cannot speak his mind.

G. Ay, of the purple grapes and crimson leaves;
But, mother, put your shawl and bonnet off.

And Frances, lass, I brought some cresses in:
Just wash them, toast the bacon, break some eggs,
And let's to supper shortly.

[*Sings.*]

My neighbor White; we met to-day,
He always had a cheerful way,
  As if he breathed at ease;
My neighbor White lives down the glade,
And I live higher, in the shade
  Of my old walnut-trees.

So many lads and lasses small,
To feed them all, to clothe them all,
  Must surely tax his wit;
I see his thatch when I look out,
His branching roses creep about
  And vines half-smother it.

There white-haired urchins climb his eaves
And little watch-fires heap with leaves,
  And milky filberts hoard;
And there his oldest daughter stands
With downcast eyes and skilful hands
  Before her ironing-board.

She comforts all her mother's days,
And with her sweet obedient ways
  She makes her labor light;
So sweet to hear, so fair to see!
O, she is much too good for me,
  That lovely Lettice White!

'Tis hard to feel one's self a fool!
With that same lass I went to school;

I then was great and wise;
She read upon an easier book,
And I — I never cared to look
Into her shy blue eyes.

And now I know they must be there
Sweet eyes, behind those lashes fair
That will not raise their rim:
If maids be shy, he cures who can;
But if a man be shy — a man —
Why then the worse for him!

My mother cries, "For such a lad
A wife is easy to be had
And always to be found;
A finer scholar scarce can be,
And for a foot and leg," says she,
"He beats the country round!

"My handsome boy must stoop his head
To clear her door whom he would wed."
Weak praise, but fondly sung!
"O mother! scholars sometimes fail—
And what can foot and leg avail
To him that wants a tongue!"

When by her ironing-board I sit
Her little sisters round me flit,
And bring me forth their store;
Dark cluster grapes of dusty blue,
And small sweet apples, bright of hue,
And crimson to the core.

But she abideth silent, fair,
All shaded by her flaxen hair,

The blushes come and go;
I look, and I no more can speak
Than the red sun that on her cheek
Smiles as he lieth low.

Sometimes the roses by the latch,
Or scarlet vine-leaves from her thatch.
Come sailing down like birds;
When from their drifts her board I clear
She thanks me, but I scarce can hear
The shyly uttered words.

Oft have I wooed sweet Lettice White
By daylight and by candlelight
When we two were apart.
Some better day come on apace,
And let me tell her face to face,
"Maiden, thou hast my heart."

How gently rock yon poplars high
Against the reach of primrose sky
With heaven's pale candles stored!
She sees them all, sweet Lettice White;
I'll e'en go sit again to-night
Beside her ironing-board!

Why, you young rascal! who would think it now!
No sooner do I stop than you look up.
What would you have your poor old father do?
'Twas a brave song, long-winded, and not loud.

M. He heard the bacon sputter on the fork,
And heard his mother's step across the floor.
Where did you get that song — 'tis new to me?

G. I bought it of a peddler.

M. Did you so?

Well, you were always for the love-songs, George.

F. My dear, just lay his head upon your arm,
And if you'll pace and sing two minutes more
He needs must sleep — his eyes are full of sleep.

G. Do you sing, mother.

F. Ay, good mother, do;
'Tis long since we have heard you.

M. Like enough;
I'm an old woman, and the girls and lads
I used to sing to sleep o'ertop me now.
What should I sing for?

G. Why, to pleasure us.
Sing in the chimney-corner, where you sit,
And I'll pace gently with the little one.

[*M. sings.*]

When sparrows build, and the leaves break forth,
My old sorrow wakes and cries,
For I know there is dawn in the far, far north,
And a scarlet sun doth rise;
Like a scarlet fleece the snow-field spreads,
And the icy founts run free;
And the bergs begin to bow their heads,
And plunge, and sail in the sea.

Oh, my lost love, and my own, own love,
And my love that loved me so!
Is there never a chink in the world above
Where they listen for words from below?

Nay, I spoke once, and I grieved thee sore ;
I remember all that I said ;
And now thou wilt hear me no more — no more
Till the sea gives up her dead.

Thou didst set thy foot on the ship, and sail
To the ice-fields and the snow ;
Thou wert sad, for thy love did not avail,
And the end I could not know.
How could I tell I should love thee to-day,
Whom that day I held not dear ?
How could I know I should love thee away
When I did not love thee anear ?

We shall walk no more through the sodden plain
With the faded bents o'erspread ;
We shall stand no more by the seething main
While the dark wrack drives o'erhead ;
We shall part no more in the wind and the rain,
Where thy last farewell was said ;
But perhaps I shall meet thee and know thee again
When the sea gives up her dead.

F. Asleep at last, and time he was, indeed.
Turn back the cradle-quilt, and lay him in ;
And, mother, will you please to draw your chair? —
The supper's ready.

SCHOLAR AND CARPENTER.

WHILE ripening corn grew thick and deep,
And here and there men stood to reap,
One morn I put my heart to sleep
And to the lanes I took my way.
The goldfinch on a thistle-head
Stood scattering seedlets while she fed;
The wrens their pretty gossip spread,
Or joined a random roundelay.

On hanging cobwebs shone the dew,
And thick the wayside clovers grew;
The feeding bee had much to do,
So fast did honey-drops exude:
She sucked and murmured, and was gone,
And lit on other blooms anon,
The while I learned a lesson on
The source and sense of quietude.

For sheep-bells chiming from a wold,
Or bleat of lamb within its fold,
Or cooing of love-legends old
To dove-wives make not quiet less;

Ecstatic chirp of wingèd thing,
Or bubbling of the water spring,
Are sounds that more than silence bring,
  Itself and its delightsomeness.

While thus I went to gladness fain,
I had but walked a mile or twain
Before my heart woke up again,
  As dreaming she had slept too late;
The morning freshness that she viewed
With her own meanings she endued,
And touched with her solicitude
  The natures she did meditate.

"If quiet is, for it I wait;
To it, ah! let me wed my fate,
And, like a sad wife, supplicate
  My roving lord no more to flee;
If leisure is — but, ah! 'tis not —
'Tis long past praying for, God wot;
The fashion of it men forgot,
  About the age of chivalry.

"Sweet is the leisure of the bird;
She craves no time for work deferred;
Her wings are not to aching stirred
  Providing for her helpless ones.
Fair is the leisure of the wheat;
All night the damps about it fleet;

All day it basketh in the heat,
And grows, and whispers orisons.

"Grand is the leisure of the earth;
She gives her happy myriads birth,
And after harvest fears not dearth,
But goes to sleep in snow-wreaths dim.
Dread is the leisure up above
The while He sits whose name is Love,
And waits, as Noah did, for the dove,
To wit if she would fly to him.

"He waits for us while, houseless things,
We beat about with bruisèd wings
On the dark floods and water-springs,
The ruined world, the desolate sea;
With open windows from the prime
All night, all day, he waits sublime,
Until the fulness of the time
Decreed from His eternity.

"Where is OUR leisure? — give us rest.
Where is the quiet we possessed?
We must have had it once — were blest
With peace whose phantoms yet entice.
Sorely the mother of mankind
Longed for the garden left behind;
For we still prove some yearnings blind
Inherited from Paradise."

"Hold, heart!" I cried; "for trouble sleeps;
I hear no sound of aught that weeps;
I will not look into thy deeps —
I am afraid, I am afraid!"
"Afraid!" she saith; "and yet 'tis true
That what man dreads he still should view —
Should do the thing he fears to do,
And storm the ghosts in ambuscade."

"What good?" I sigh. "Was reason meant
To straighten branches that are bent,
Or soothe an ancient discontent,
The instinct of a race dethroned?
Ah! doubly should that instinct go,
Must the four rivers cease to flow,
Nor yield those rumors sweet and low
Wherewith man's life is undertoned."

"Yet had I but the past," she cries,
"And it was lost, I would arise
And comfort me some other wise.
But more than loss about me clings:
I am but restless with my race;
The whispers from a heavenly place,
Once dropped among us, seem to chase
Rest with their prophet-visitings.

"The race is like a child, as yet
Too young for all things to be set

Plainly before him with no let
Or hindrance meet for his degree;
But ne'ertheless by much too old
Not to perceive that men withhold
More of the story than is told,
And so infer a mystery.

"If the Celestials daily fly
With messages on missions high,
And float, our masts and turrets nigh,
Conversing on heaven's great intents;
What wonder hints of coming things,
Whereto man's hope and yearning clings,
Should drop like feathers from their wings
And give us vague presentiments?

"And as the waxing moon can take
The tidal waters in her wake,
And lead them round and round, to break
Obedient to her drawings dim;
So may the movements of His mind,
The first Great Father of mankind,
Affect with answering movements blind,
And draw the souls that breathe by Him.

"We had a message long ago
That like a river peace should flow,
And Eden bloom again below.
We heard, and we began to wait:

Full soon that message men forgot;
Yet waiting is their destined lot,
And, waiting for they know not what,
They strive with yearnings passionate.

"Regret and faith alike enchain;
There was a loss, there comes a gain;
We stand at fault betwixt the twain,
And that is veiled for which we pant.
Our lives are short, our ten times seven;
We think the counsels held in heaven
Sit long, ere yet that blissful leaven
Work peace amongst the militant.

"Then we blame God that sin should be:
Adam began it at the tree,
'The woman whom THOU gavest me;'
And we adopt his dark device.
O long Thou tarriest! come and reign,
And bring forgiveness in Thy train,
And give us in our hands again
The apples of Thy Paradise."

"Far-seeing heart! if that be all
The happy things that did not fall,"
I sighed, "from every coppice call,
They never from that garden went.
Behold their joy," so comfort thee,
Behold the blossom and the bee,

For they are yet as good and free
As when poor Eve was innocent.

"But reason thus: 'If we sank low,
If the lost garden we forego,
Each in his day, nor ever know
But in our poet souls its face;
Yet we may rise until we reach
A height untold of in its speech —
A lesson that it could not teach
Learn in this darker dwelling-place.'

"And reason on: 'We take the spoil;
Loss made us poets, and the soil
Taught us great patience in our toil,
And life is kin to God through death.
Christ were not One with us but so;
And if bereft of Him we go,
Dearer the heavenly mansions grow,
His home, to man that wandereth.'

"Content thee so, and ease thy smart."
With that she slept again, my heart,
And I admired, and took my part
With crowds of happy things the while
With open velvet butterflies
That swung and spread their peacock eyes,
As if they cared no more to rise
From off their beds of camomile.

The blackcaps in an orchard met,
Praising the berries while they ate:
The finch that flew her beak to whet
Before she joined them on the tree;
The water-mouse among the reeds —
His bright eyes glancing black as beads,
So happy with a bunch of seeds —
I felt their gladness heartily.

But I came on; I smelt the hay,
And up the hills I took my way,
And down them still made holiday,
And walked, and wearied not a whit;
But ever with the lane I went
Until it dropped with steep descent
Cut deep into the rock, a tent
Of maple branches roofing it.

Adown the rock small runlets wept,
And reckless ivies leaned and crept,
And little spots of sunshine slept
On its brown steeps and made them fair;
And broader beams athwart it shot,
Where martins cheeped in many a knot,
For they had ta'en a sandy plot
And scooped another Petra there.

And deeper down, hemmed in and hid
From upper light and life, amid

The swallows gossiping, I thrid
Its mazes, till the dipping land
Sank to the level of my lane:
That was the last hill of the chain,
And fair below I saw the plain
That seemed cold cheer to reprimand.

Half-drowned in sleepy peace it lay,
As satiate with the boundless play
Of sunshine in its green array.
And clear-cut hills of gloomy blue,
To keep it safe, rose up behind,
As with a charmèd ring to bind
The grassy sea, where clouds might find
A place to bring their shadows to.

I said and blest that pastoral grace,
"How sweet thou art, thou sunny place!
Thy God approves thy smiling face:"
But straight my heart put in her word;
She said, "Albeit thy face I bless,
There have been times, sweet wilderness,
When I have wished to love thee less,
Such pangs thy smile administered."

But, lo! I reached a field of wheat,
And by its gate full clear and sweet
A workman sang, while at his feet
Played a young child, all life and stir —

A three years' child, with rosy lip,
Who in the song had partnership,
Made happy with each falling chip
  Dropped by the busy carpenter.

This reared a new gate for the old,
And loud the tuneful measure rolled,
But stopped as I came up to hold
  Some kindly talk of passing things.
Brave were his eyes, and frank his mien;
Of all men's faces, calm or keen,
A better I have never seen
  In all my lonely wanderings.

And how it was I scarce can tell,
We seemed to please each other well;
I lingered till a noonday bell
  Had sounded, and his task was done.
An oak had screened us from the heat
And 'neath it in the standing wheat,
A cradle and a fair retreat,
  Full sweetly slept the little one.

The workman rested from his stroke,
And manly were the words he spoke,
Until the smiling babe awoke
  And prayed to him for milk and food.
Then to a runlet forth he went,
And brought a wallet from the bent,

And bid me to the meal, intent
I should not quit his neighborhood.

"For here," said he, "are bread and beer,
And meat enough to make good cheer;
Sir, eat with me, and have no fear,
For none upon my work depend,
Saving this child; and I may say
That I am rich, for every day
I put by somewhat; therefore stay,
And to such eating condescend."

We ate. The child — child fair to see —
Began to cling about his knee,
And he, down leaning fatherly,
Received some softly-prattled prayer;
He smiled as if he felt its charm,
And with his labor-hardened palm
Pushed from the baby-forehead calm
Those shining locks that clustered there.

The rosy mouth made fresh essay —
"O would he sing, or would he play?"
I looked, my thought would make its way —
"Fair is your child of face and limb,
The round blue eyes full sweetly shine."
He answered me with glance benign —
"Ay, Sir; but he is none of mine,
Although I set great store by him."

With that, as if his heart was fain
To open — nathless not complain —
He let my quiet questions gain
His story: "Not of kin to me,"
Repeating; "but asleep, awake,
For worse, for better, him I take,
To cherish for my dead wife's sake,
And count him as her legacy.

"I married with the sweetest lass
That ever stepped on meadow grass;
That ever at her looking-glass
Some pleasure took, some natural care;
That ever swept a cottage-floor
And worked all day, nor e'er gave o'er
Till eve, then watched beside the door
Till her good man should meet her there.

"But I lost all in its fresh prime,
My wife fell ill before her time;
Just as the bells began to chime
One Sunday morn. By next day's light
Her little babe was born and dead,
And she, unconscious what she said,
With feeble hands about her spread,
Sought it with yearnings infinite.

"With mother-longing still beguiled,
And lost in fever-fancies wild,

She piteously bemoaned her child
That we had stolen, she said, away.
And ten sad days she sighed to me,
'I cannot rest until I see
My pretty one! I think that he
Smiled in my face but yesterday.'

"Then she would change, and faintly try
To sing some tender lullaby.
And 'Ah!' would moan, 'if I should die,
Who, sweetest babe, would cherish thee?'
Then weep, 'My pretty boy is grown
With tender feet on the cold stone;
He stands, for he can stand alone,
And no one leads him motherly.'

"Then she with dying movements slow
Would seem to knit, or seem to sew:
'His feet are bare, he must not go
Unshod:' and as her death drew on,
'O little baby,' she would sigh;
'My little child, I cannot die
Till I have you to slumber nigh —
You, you to set mine eyes upon.'

"When she spake thus, and moaning lay,
They said, 'She cannot pass away,
So sore she longs:' and as the day
Broke on the hills, I left her side.

Mourning along this lane I went;
Some travelling folk had pitched their tent
Up yonder: there a woman, bent
With age, sat meanly canopied.

"A twelvemonths' child was at her side:
'Whose infant may that be?' I cried.
'His that will own him,' she replied;
'His mother's dead, no worse could be.'
'Since you can give — or else I erred —
See, you are taken at your word,'
Quoth I; 'That child is mine; I heard,
And own him! Rise, and give him me.'

"She rose amazed, but cursed me too;
She could not hold such luck for true,
But gave him soon, with small ado.
I laid him by my Lucy's side:
Close to her face that baby crept,
And stroked it, and the sweet soul wept;
Then, while upon her arm he slept,
She passed, for she was satisfied.

"I loved her well, I wept her sore,
And when her funeral left my door
I thought that I should never more
Feel any pleasure near me glow;
But I have learned, though this I had,
'Tis sometimes natural to be glad,

And no man can be always sad
Unless he wills to have it so.

"Oh, I had heavy nights at first,
And daily wakening was the worst:
For then my grief arose, and burst
Like something fresh upon my head;
Yet when less keen it seemed to grow
I was not pleased — I wished to go
Mourning adown this vale of woe,
For all my life uncomforted.

"I grudged myself the lightsome air,
That makes man cheerful unaware;
When comfort came, I did not care
To take it in, to feel it stir:
And yet God took with me his plan,
And now for my appointed span
I think I am a happier man
For having wed and wept for her.

"Because no natural tie remains,
On this small thing I spend my gains;
God makes me love him for my pains,
And binds me so to wholesome care:
I would not lose from my past life
That happy year, that happy wife!
Yet now I wage no useless strife
With feelings blithe and debonair.

"I have the courage to be gay,
Although she lieth lapped away
Under the daisies, for I say,
'Thou wouldst be glad if thou couldst see':
My constant thought makes manifest
I have not what I love the best,
But I must thank God for the rest
While I hold heaven a verity."

He rose, upon his shoulder set
The child, and while with vague regret
We parted, pleased that we had met,
My heart did with herself confer;
With wholesome shame she did repent
Her reasonings idly eloquent,
And said, "I might be more content:
But God go with the carpenter."

THE STAR'S MONUMENT.

IN THE CONCLUDING PART OF A DISCOURSE ON FAME.

(*He thinks.*)

IF there be memory in the world to come,
If thought recur to SOME THINGS silenced here,
Then shall the deep heart be no longer dumb,
But find expression in that happier sphere;
It shall not be denied their utmost sum
Of love to speak without or fault or fear,
But utter to the harp, with changes sweet,
Words that, forbidden still, then heaven were incomplete.

(*He speaks.*)

Now let us talk about the ancient days,
And things which happened long before our birth:
It is a pity to lament that praise
Should be no shadow in the train of worth.
What is it, madam, that your heart dismays?
Why murmur at the course of this vast earth?
Think rather of the work than of the praise;
Come, we will talk about the ancient days.

"There was a Poet, Madam, once," said he;
"I will relate his story to you now,

While through the branches of this apple-tree
Some spots of sunshine flicker on your brow;
While every flower hath on its breast a bee,
And every bird in stirring doth endow
The grass with falling blooms that smoothly glide,
As ships drop down a river with the tide."

For telling of his tale no fitter place
Then this old orchard, sloping to the west;
Through its pink dome of blossom I can trace
Some overlying azure; for the rest,
These flowery branches round us interlace;
The ground is hollowed like a mossy nest:
Who talks of fame while the religious spring
Offers the incense of her blossoming?

"There was a Poet, Madam, once," said he,
"Who, while he walked at sundown in a lane,
Took to his heart the hope that destiny
Had singled him this guerdon to obtain,
That by the power of his sweet minstrelsy
Some hearts for truth and goodness he should gain,
And charm some grovellers to uplift their eyes
And suddenly wax conscious of the skies."

"Master, good e'en to ye!" a woodman said,
Who the low hedge was trimming with his shears.
"This hour is fine," — the Poet bowed his head.
"More fine," he thought, "O friend! to me appears

The sunset than to you; finer the spread
Of orange lustre through these azure spheres,
Where little clouds lie still, like flocks of sheep,
Or vessels sailing in God's other deep.

"O finer far! What work so high as mine,
Interpreter betwixt the world and man,
Nature's ungathered pearls to set and shrine
The mystery she wraps her in to scan;
Her unsyllabic voices to combine,
And serve her with such love as poets can;
Her aërial sounds in mortal words to bind,
Then die, and leave the poem to mankind?

"O fair, O fine, O lot to be desired,
Early and late my heart appeals to me,
And says, 'O work, O will — Thou man be fired
To earn this lot,' — she says, 'I would not be
A worker for mine OWN bread, or one hired
For mine OWN profit. O, I would be free
To work for others; Love so earned of them
Should be my wages and my diadem.

"'Then when I died I should not fall,' says she,
'Like dropping flowers that no man noticeth,
But like a great branch of some stately tree
Rent in a tempest, and flung down to death,
Thick with green leafage — so that piteously
Each passer-by that ruin shuddereth,

And saith, The gap this branch hath left is wide;
The loss thereof can never be supplied.'"

But, Madam, while the Poet pondered so,
Toward the leafy hedge he turned his eye,
And saw two slender branches that did grow,
And from it rising spring and flourish high:
Their tops were twined together fast, and, lo,
Their shadow crossed the path as he went by —
The shadow of a wild rose and a brier,
And it was shaped in semblance like a lyre.

In sooth, a lyre! and as the soft air played,
Those branches stirred, but did not disunite.
"O emblem meet for me!" the Poet said;
"Ay, I accept and own thee for my right;
The shadowy lyre across my feet is laid,
Distinct though frail, and clear with crimson light;
Fast is it twined to bear the windy strain,
And, supple, it will bend and rise again.

"This lyre is cast across the dusty way,
The common path that common men pursue;
I crave like blessing for my shadowy lay,
Life's trodden paths with beauty to renew,
And cheer the eve of many a toil-stained day.
Light it, old sun, wet it, thou common dew,
That 'neath men's feet its image still may be
While yet it waves above them, living lyre, like thee!"

But even as the Poet spoke, behold
He lifted up his face toward the sky;
The ruddy sun dipt under the gray wold,
His shadowy lyre was gone: and, passing by,
The woodman lifting up his shears, was bold
Their temper on those branches twain to try,
And all their loveliness and leafage sweet
Fell in the pathway, at the Poet's feet.

"Ah! my fair emblem that I chose," quoth he,
"That for myself I coveted, but now
Too soon, methinks, thou hast been false to me;
The lyre from pathway fades, the light from brow."
Then straightway turned he from it hastily,
As dreams that waking sense will disallow;
And while the highway heavenward paled apace
He went on westward to his dwelling-place.

He went on steadily, while far and fast
The summer darkness dropped upon the world,
A gentle air among the cloudlets passed
And fanned away their crimson; then it curled
The yellow poppies in the field, and cast
A dimness on the grasses, for it furled
Their daisies, and swept out the purple stain
That eve had left upon the pastoral plain.

He reached his city. Lo! the darkened street
Where he abode was full of gazing crowds;

He heard the muffled tread of many feet;
A multitude stood gazing at the clouds.
"What mark ye there," said he, "and wherefore meet?
Only a passing mist the heaven o'ershrouds;
It breaks, it parts, it drifts like scattered spars —
What lies behind it but the nightly stars?"

Then did the gazing crowd to him aver
They sought a lamp in heaven whose light was hid;
For that in sooth an old Astronomer
Down from his roof had rushed into their mid,
Frighted, and fain with others to confer,
That he had cried, "O sirs!" — and upward bid
Them gaze, — "O sirs, a light is quenched afar;
Look up, my masters, we have lost a star!"

The people pointed, and the Poet's eyes
Flew upward, where a gleaming sisterhood
Swam in the dewy heaven. The very skies
Were mutable; for all-amazed he stood
To see that truly not in any wise
He could behold them as of old, nor could
His eyes receive the whole whereof he wot;
But when he told them over, one WAS NOT.

While yet he gazed and pondered reverently,
The fickle folk began to move away.
"It is but one star less for us to see;
And what does one star signify?" quoth they;

"The heavens are full of them." "But, ah!" said he,
"That star was bright while yet she lasted." "Ay!"
They answered: "Praise her, Poet, an' ye will,
Some are now shining that are brighter still."

"Poor star! to be disparagèd so soon
On her withdrawal," thus the Poet sighed,
"That men should miss, and straight deny her noon
Its brightness!" But the people in their pride
Said, "How are we beholden? 'twas no boon
She gave. Her nature 'twas to shine so wide
She could not choose but shine, nor could we know
Such star had ever dwelt in heaven but so."

The Poet answered sadly, "That is true!"
And then he thought upon unthankfulness;
While some went homeward; and the residue,
Reflecting that the stars are numberless,
Mourned that man's daylight hours should be so few,
So short the shining that his path may bless:
To nearer themes then tuned their willing lips,
And thought no more upon the star's eclipse.

But he, the Poet, could not rest content
Till he had found that old Astronomer;
Therefore at midnight to his house he went
And prayed him be his tale's interpreter.
And yet upon the heaven his eyes he bent,
Hearing the marvel; yet he sought for her

That was awanting, in the hope her face
Once more might fill its reft abiding-place.

Then said the old Astronomer: "My son,
I sat alone upon my roof to-night;
I saw the stars come forth, and scarcely shun
To fringe the edges of the western light;
I marked those ancient clusters one by one,
The same that blessed our old forefather's sight:
For God alone is older — none but He
Can charge the stars with mutability.

"The elders of the night, the steadfast stars,
The old, old stars which God has let us see,
That they might be our soul's auxiliars,
And help us to the truth how young we be —
God's youngest, latest born, as if, — some spars
And a little clay being over of them — He
Had made our world and us thereof, yet given,
To humble us, the sight of His great heaven.

"But ah! my son, to-night mine eyes have seen
The death of light, the end of old renown;
A shrinking back of glory that had been,
A dread eclipse before the Eternal's frown.
How soon a little grass will grow between
These eyes and those appointed to look down
Upon a world that was not made on high,
Till the last scenes of their long empiry.

"To-night that shining cluster now despoiled
Lay in day's wake a perfect sisterhood;
Sweet was its light to me that long had toiled,
It gleamed and trembled o'er the distant wood;
Blown in a pile the clouds from it recoiled,
Cool twilight up the sky her way made good;
I saw, but not believed; it was so strange
That one of those same stars had suffered change.

"The darkness gathered, and methought she spread,
Wrapped in a reddish haze that waxed and waned;
But notwithstanding to myself I said —
'The stars are changeless; sure some mote hath stained
Mine eyes, and her fair glory minished.'
Of age and failing vision I complained,
And thought 'some vapor in the heavens doth swim,
That makes her look so large and yet so dim.'

"But I gazed round, and all her lustrous peers
In her red presence showed but wan and white;
For like a living coal beheld through tears
She glowed and quivered with a gloomy light:
Methought she trembled, as all sick through fears,
Helpless, appalled, appealing to the night;
Like one who throws his arms up to the sky,
And bows down suffering, hopeless of reply.

"At length, as if an everlasting Hand
Had taken hold upon her in her place,

And swiftly, like a golden grain of sand,
Through all the deep infinitudes of space,
Was drawing her — God's truth as here I stand —
Backward and inward to itself, her face
Fast lessened, lessened, till it looked no more
Than smallest atom on a boundless shore.

"And she that was so fair, I saw her lie,
The smallest thing in God's great firmament,
Till night was at the darkest, and on high
Her sisters glittered, though her light was spent;
I strained to follow her, each aching eye,
So swiftly at her Maker's will she went;
I looked again — I looked — the star was gone,
And nothing marked in heaven where she had shone."

"Gone!" said the Poet, "and about to be
Forgotten: O, how sad a fate is hers!"
"How is it sad, my son?" all reverently
The old man answered; "though she ministers
No longer with her lamp to me and thee,
She has fulfilled her mission. God transfers
Or dims her ray; yet was she blest as bright,
For all her life was spent in giving light.

"Her mission she fulfilled assuredly,"
The Poet cried; "but, O unhappy star!
None praise and few will bear in memory
The name she went by. O, from far, from far

Comes down methinks her mournful voice to me,
Full of regrets that men so thankless are."
So said, he told that old Astronomer
All that the gazing crowd had said of her.

And he went on to speak in bitter wise,
As one who seems to tell another's fate,
But feels that nearer meaning underlies,
And points its sadness to his own estate:
"If such be the reward," he said, with sighs,
"Envy to earn for love, for goodness hate —
If such be thy reward, hard case is thine!
It had been better for thee not to shine.

"If to reflect a light that is divine
Makes that which doth reflect it better seen,
And if to see is to contemn the shrine,
'Twere surely better it had never been:
It had been better for her NOT TO SHINE,
And for me NOT TO SING. Better I ween
For us to yield no more that radiance bright,
For them, to lack the light than scorn the light."

"Strange words were those from Poet lips," said he;
And then he paused, and sighed, and turned to look
Upon the lady's downcast eyes, and see
How fast the honey-bees in settling shook
Those apple blossoms on her from the tree;
He watched her busy fingers as they took

And slipped the knotted thread, and thought how much
He would have given that hand to hold — to touch.

At length, as suddenly become aware
Of this long pause, she lifted up her face,
And he withdrew his eyes — she looked so fair
And cold, he thought, in her unconscious grace.
"Ah! little dreams she of the restless care,"
He thought, "that makes my heart to throb apace;
Though we this morning part, the knowledge sends
No thrill to her calm pulse — we are but FRIENDS."

Ah! turret clock (he thought), I would thy hand
Were hid behind yon towering maple-trees!
Ah! tell-tale shadow, but one moment stand —
Dark shadow — fast advancing to my knees;
Ah! foolish heart (he thought), that vainly planned
By feigning gladness to arrive at ease;
Ah! painful hour, yet pain to think it ends;
I must remember that we are but friends.

And while the knotted thread moved to and fro,
In sweet regretful tones that lady said:
"It seemeth that the fame you would forego
The Poet whom you tell of coveted;
But I would fain, methinks, his story know.
And was he loved?" said she, "or was he wed?
And had he friends?" "One friend, perhaps," said he,
"But for the rest, I pray you let it be."

Ah! little bird (he thought), most patient bird,
Breasting thy speckled eggs the long day through,
By so much as my reason is preferred
Above thine instinct, I my work would do
Better than thou dost thine. Thou hast not stirred
This hour thy wing. Ah! russet bird, I sue
For a like patience to wear through these hours —
Bird on thy nest among the apple-flowers.

I will not speak — I will not speak to thee,
My star! and soon to be my lost, lost star.
The sweetest, first, that ever shone on me,
So high above me and beyond so far;
I can forego thee, but not bear to see
My love, like rising mist, thy lustre mar:
That were a base return for thy sweet light.
Shine, though I never more shall see that thou art bright.

Never! 'Tis certain that no hope is — none!
No hope for me, and yet for thee no fear.
The hardest part of my hard task is done;
Thy calm assures me that I am not dear;
Though far and fast the rapid moments run,
Thy bosom heaveth not, thine eyes are clear;
Silent, perhaps a little sad at heart
She is. I am her friend, and I depart.

Silent she had been, but she raised her face;
"And will you end," said she, "this half-told tale?"

"Yes, it were best," he answered her. "The place
Where I left off was where he felt to fail
His courage, Madam, through the fancy base
That they who love, endure, or work, may rail
And cease — if all their love, the works they wrought,
And their endurance, men have set at nought.

"It had been better for me NOT to sing,"
My Poet said, "and for her NOT to shine;"
But him the old man answered, sorrowing,
"My son, did God who made her, the Divine
Lighter of suns, when down to yon bright ring
He cast her, like some gleaming almandine,
And set her in her place, begirt with rays,
Say unto her, 'Give light,' or say 'Earn praise?'"

The Poet said, "He made her to give light."
"My son," the old man answered, "Blest are such;
A blessed lot is theirs; but if each night
Mankind had praised her radiance, inasmuch
As praise had never made it wax more bright,
And cannot now rekindle with its touch
Her lost effulgence, it is nought. I wot
That praise was not her blessing nor her lot."

"Ay," said the Poet, "I my words abjure,
And I repent me that I uttered them;
But by her light and by its forfeiture
She shall not pass without her requiem.

Though my name perish, yet shall hers endure;
Though I should be forgotten, she, lost gem,
Shall be remembered; though she sought not fame,
It shall be busy with her beauteous name.

"For I will raise in her bright memory,
Lost now on earth, a lasting monument,
And graven on it shall recorded be
That all her rays to light mankind were spent;
And I will sing albeit none heedeth me,
On her exemplar being still intent:
While in men's sight shall stand the record thus —
So long as she did last she lighted us.'"

So said, he raised, according to his vow,
On the green grass where oft his townsfolk met,
Under the shadow of a leafy bough
That leaned toward a singing rivulet,
One pure white stone, whereon, like crown on brow,
The image of the vanished star was set;
And this was graven on the pure white stone
In golden letters — "WHILE SHE LIVED SHE SHONE."

Madam, I cannot give this story well,
My heart is beating to another chime;
My voice must needs a different cadence swell;
It is yon singing-bird, which all the time
Wooeth his nested mate, that doth dispel
My thoughts. What deem you, could a lover's rhyme

The sweetness of that passionate lay excel? "
O soft, O low her voice — "I cannot tell."

(*He thinks.*)

The old man — ay, he spoke, he was not hard;
"She was his joy," he said, "his comforter,
But he would trust me. I was not debarred
Whate'er my heart approved to say to her."
Approved! O torn and tempted and ill-starred
And breaking heart, approve not nor demur!
It is the serpent that beguileth thee
With "God doth know" beneath this apple-tree

Yea, God DOTH know, and only God doth know
Have pity, God, my spirit groans to Thee!
I bear Thy curse primeval, and I go;
But heavier than on Adam falls on me
My tillage of the wilderness; for lo
I leave behind the woman, and I see
As 'twere the gates of Eden closing o'er
To hide her from my sight for evermore.

(*He speaks.*)

I am a fool, with sudden start he cried,
To let the song-bird work me such unrest
If I break off again, I pray you chide,
For morning fleeteth, with my tale at best
Half-told. That white stone, Madam, gleamed beside
The little rivulet, and all men pressed

To read the lost one's story traced thereon,
The golden legend — "While she lived she shone."

And, Madam, when the Poet heard them read,
And children spell the letters softly through,
It may be, that he felt at heart some need,
Some craving to be thus remembered too;
It may be that he wondered if indeed
He must die wholly when he passed from view;
It may be, wished, when death his eyes made dim,
That some kind hand would raise such stone for him.

But shortly, as there comes to most of us,
There came to him the need to quit his home:
To tell you why were simply hazardous.
What said I, Madam? — men were made to roam
My meaning is. It hath been always thus:
They are athirst for mountains and sea-foam;
Heirs of this world, what wonder if perchance
They long to see their grand inheritance.

He left his city, and went forth to teach
Mankind, his peers, the hidden harmony
That underlies God's discords, and to reach
And touch the master-string that like a sigh
Thrills in their souls, as if it would beseech
Some hand to sound it, and to satisfy
Its yearning for expression: but no word
Till poet touch it hath to make its music heard

(*He thinks.*)

I know that God is good, though evil dwells
Among us, and doth all things holiest share;
That there is joy in heaven, while yet our knells
Sound for the souls which he has summoned there;
That painful love unsatisfied hath spells
Earned by its smart to soothe its fellows care:
But yet this atom cannot in the whole
Forget itself — it aches a separate soul.

(*He speaks.*)

But, Madam, to my poet I return
With his sweet cadences of woven words;
He made their rude untutored hearts to burn
And melt like gold refined. No brooding birds
Sing better of the love that doth sojourn
Hid in the nest of home, which softly girds
The beating heart of life; and, strait though it be,
Is straitness better than wide liberty.

He taught them, and they learned, but not the less
Remained unconscious whence that lore they drew,
But dreamed that of their native nobleness
Some lofty thoughts, that he had planted, grew;
His glorious maxims in a lowly dress,
Like seed sown broadcast, sprung in all men's view,
The sower, passing onward, was not known,
And all men reaped the harvest as their own.

It may be, Madam, that those ballads sweet,
Whose rhythmic measures yesterday we sung,
Which time and changes make not obsolete,
But (as a river bears down blossoms flung
Upon its breast) take with them while they fleet —
It may be from his lyre that first they sprung:
But who can tell, since work surviveth fame,
The rhyme is left, but lost the Poet's name.

He worked, and bravely he fulfilled his trust —
So long he wandered sowing worthy seed,
Watering of wayside buds that were adust,
And touching for the common ear his reed —
So long to wear away the cankering rust
That dulls the gold of life — so long to plead
With sweetest music for all souls oppressed,
That he was old ere he had thought of rest.

Old and gray-headed, leaning on a staff,
To that great city of his birth he came,
And at its gates he paused with wondering laugh
To think how changed were all his thoughts of fame
Since first he carved the golden epitaph
To keep in memory a worthy name,
And thought forgetfulness had been its doom
But for a few bright letters on a tomb.

The old Astronomer had long since died;
The friends of youth were gone and far dispersed;

Strange were the domes that rose on every side;
Strange fountains on his wondering vision burst;
The men of yesterday their business plied;
No face was left that he had known at first;
And in the city gardens, lo, he sees
The saplings that he set are stately trees.

Upon the grass beneath their welcome shade
Behold! he marks the fair white monument,
And on its face the golden words displayed,
For sixty years their lustre have not spent;
He sitteth by it and is not afraid,
But in its shadow he is well content;
And envies not, though bright their gleamings are,
The golden letters of the vanished star.

He gazeth up; exceeding bright appears
That golden legend to his aged eyes,
For they are dazzled till they fill with tears,
And his lost Youth doth like a vision rise;
She saith to him, "In all these toilsome years,
What hast thou won by work or enterprise?
What hast thou won to make amends to thee,
As thou didst swear to do, for loss of me?"

"O man! O white-haired man!" the vision said,
"Since we two sat beside this monument
Life's clearest hues are all evanishèd;
The golden wealth thou hadst of me is spent;

The wind hath swept thy flowers, their leaves are shed;
The music is played out that with thee went."
"Peace, peace!" he cried, "I lost thee, but, in sooth,
There are worse losses than the loss of youth."

He said not what those losses were — but I —
But I must leave them, for the time draws near.
Some lose not ONLY joy, but memory
Of how it felt: not love that was so dear
Lose only, but the steadfast certainty
That once they had it; doubt comes on, then fear,
And after that despondency. I wis
The Poet must have meant such loss as this.

But while he sat and pondered on his youth,
He said, "It did one deed that doth remain,
For it preserved the memory and the truth
Of her that now doth neither set nor wane,
But shine in all men's thoughts; nor sink forsooth,
And be forgotten like the summer rain.
O, it is good that man should not forget
Or benefits foregone or brightness set!"

He spoke and said, "My lot contenteth me;
I am right glad for this her worthy fame;
That which was good and great I fain would see
Drawn with a halo round what rests — its name."
This while the Poet said, behold there came
A workman with his tools anear the tree,

And when he read the words he paused awhile
And pondered on them with a wondering smile.

And then he said, "I pray you, Sir, what mean
The golden letters of this monument?"
In wonder quoth the Poet, "Hast thou been
A dweller near at hand, and their intent
Hast neither heard by voice of fame, nor seen
The marble earlier?" "Ay," said he, and leant
Upon his spade to hear the tale, then sigh,
And say it was a marvel, and pass by.

Then said the Poet, "This is strange to me."
But as he mused, with trouble in his mind,
A band of maids approached him leisurely,
Like vessels sailing with a favoring wind;
And of their rosy lips requested he,
As one that for a doubt would solving find,
The tale, if tale there were, of that white stone,
And those fair letters — "While she lived she shone."

Then like a fleet that floats becalmed they stay.
"O, Sir," saith one, "this monument is old;
But we have heard our virtuous mothers say
That by their mothers thus the tale was told:
A Poet made it; journeying then away,
He left us; and though some the meaning hold
For other than the ancient one, yet we
Receive this legend for a certainty: —

"There was a lily once, most purely white,
Beneath the shadow of these boughs it grew;
Its starry blossom it unclosed by night,
And a young Poet loved its shape and hue.
He watched it nightly, 'twas so fair a sight,
Until a stormy wind arose and blew,
And when he came once more his flower to greet
Its fallen petals drifted to his feet.

"And for his beautiful white lily's sake,
That she might be remembered where her scent
Had been right sweet, he said that he would make
In her dear memory a monument:
For she was purer than a driven flake
Of snow, and in her grace most excellent;
The loveliest life that death did ever mar,
As beautiful to gaze on as a star."

"I thank you, maid," the Poet answered her,
"And I am glad that I have heard your tale."
With that they passed; and as an inlander,
Having heard breakers raging in a gale,
And falling down in thunder, will aver
That still, when far away in grassy vale,
He seems to hear those seething waters bound,
So in his ears the maiden's voice did sound.

He leaned his face upon his hand, and thought,
And thought, until a youth came by that way;

And once again of him the Poet sought
The story of the star. "But well-a-day,"
He said, "the meaning with much doubt is fraught,
The sense thereof can no man surely say;
For still tradition sways the common ear,
That of a truth a star DID DISAPPEAR.

"But they who look beneath the outer shell
That wraps the 'kernel of the people's lore,'
Hold THAT for superstition; and they tell
That seven lovely sisters dwelt of yore
In this old city, where it so befell
That one a Poet loved; that, furthermore,
As stars above us she was pure and good,
And fairest of that beauteous sisterhood.

"So beautiful they were, those virgins seven,
That all men called them clustered stars in song,
Forgetful that the stars abide in heaven:
But woman bideth not beneath it long;
For O, alas! alas! one fated even
When stars their azure deeps began to throng,
That virgin's eyes of Poet loved waxed dim,
And all their lustrous shining waned to him.

"In summer dusk she drooped her head and sighed
Until what time the evening star went down,
And all the other stars did shining bide
Clear in the lustre of their old renown,

And then — the virgin laid her down and died:
Forgot her youth, forgot her beauty's crown,
Forgot the sisters whom she loved before,
And broke her Poet's heart for evermore."

"A mournful tale, in sooth," the lady saith:
"But did he truly grieve for evermore?"
"It may be you forget," he answereth,
"That this is but a fable at the core
O' the other fable." "Though it be but breath,"
She asketh, "was it true?'" — then he, "This lore,
Since it is fable, either way may go;
Then, if it please you, think it might be so."

"Nay, but," she saith, "if I had told your tale,
The virgin should have lived his home to bless,
Or, must she die, I would have made to fail
His useless love." "I tell you not the less,"
He sighs, "because it was of no avail,
His heart the Poet would not dispossess
Thereof: but let us leave the fable now,
My Poet heard it with an aching brow."

And he made answer thus: "I thank thee, youth;
Strange is thy story to these aged ears,
But I bethink me thou hast told a truth
Under the guise of fable. If my tears,
Thou lost belovèd star, lost now, forsooth,
Indeed, could bring thee back among thy peers,

So new thou should'st be deemed as newly seen,
For men forget that thou hast ever been.

"There was a morning when I longed for fame,
  There was a noontide when I passed it by,
There is an evening when I think not shame
  Its substance and its being to deny;
For if men bear in mind great deeds — the name
  Of him that wrought them shall they leave to die;
Or if his name they shall have deathless writ,
They change the deeds that first ennobled it.

"O golden letters of this monument!
  O words to celebrate a loved renown
Lost now or wrested, and to fancies lent,
  Or on a fabled forehead set for crown!
For my departed star, I am content,
  Though legends dim and years her memory drown:
For what were fame to her, compared and set
By this great truth which ye make lustrous yet?"

"Adieu!" the Poet said, "my vanished star,
  Thy duty and thy happiness were one.
Work is heaven's hest; its fame is sublunar,
  The fame thou dost not need — the work is done.
For thee I am content that these things are;
  More than content were I, my race being run,
Might it be true of me, though none thereon
Should muse regretful — 'While he lived he shone.'"

So said, the Poet rose and went his way,
And that same lot he proved whereof he spake.
Madam, my story is told out; the day
Draws out her shadows, time doth overtake
The morning. That which endeth call a lay,
Sung after pause — a motto in the break
Between two chapters of a tale not new,
Nor joyful — but a common tale. Adieu.

And that same God who made your face so fair
And gave your woman's heart its tenderness:
So shield the blessing he implanted there,
That it may never turn to your distress,
And never cost you trouble or despair,
Nor granted leave the granter comfortless;
But like a river blest where'er it flows,
Be still receiving while it still bestows.

Adieu, he said, and paused, while she sat mute
In the soft shadow of the apple-tree;
The skylark's song rang like a joyous flute,
The brook went prattling past her restlessly:
She let their tongues be her tongue's substitute,
It was the wind that sighed, it was not she:
And what the lark, the brook, the wind, had said,
We cannot tell, for none interpreted.

Their counsels might be hard to reconcile,
They might not suit the moment or the spot.

She rose and laid her work aside the while
Down in the sunshine of that grassy plot;
She looked upon him with an almost smile,
And held to him a hand that faltered not.
One moment — bird and brook went warbling on,
And the wind sighed again — and he was gone.

So quietly, as if she heard no more,
Or skylark in the azure overhead,
Or water slipping past the cressy shore,
Or wind that rose in sighs, and sighing fled —
So quietly, until the alders hoar
Took him beneath them; till the downward spread
Of planes engulfed him in their leafy seas —
She stood beneath her rose-flushed apple-trees.

And then she stooped toward the mossy grass,
And gathered up her work and went her way;
Straight to that ancient turret she did pass,
And startle back some fawns that were at play.
She did not sigh, she never said, "Alas!"
Although he was her friend: but still that day,
Where elm and hornbeam spread a towering dome,
She crossed the dells to her ancestral home.

And did she love him? — what if she did not?
Then home was still the home of happiest years;
Nor thought was exiled to partake his lot,
Nor heart lost courage through forboding fears;

Nor echo did against her secret plot,
Nor music her betray to painful tears;
Nor life become a dream, and sunshine dim,
And riches poverty, because of him.

But did she love him? — what and if she did?
Love cannot cool the burning Austral sand,
Nor show the secret waters that lie hid
In arid valleys of that desert land.
Love has no spells can scorching winds forbid,
Or bring the help which tarries near to hand,
Or spread a cloud for curtaining faded eyes
That gaze up dying into alien skies.

A DEAD YEAR.

TOOK a year out of my life and story —
A dead year, and said, "I will hew thee a tomb!
'All the kings of the nations lie in glory;'
Cased in cedar, and shut in a sacred gloom;
Swathed in linen, and precious unguents old;
Painted with cinnabar, and rich with gold.

"Silent they rest, in solemn salvatory,
Sealed from the moth and the owl and the flitter-mouse —
Each with his name on his brow.
'All the kings of the nations lie in glory,
Every one in his own house:'
Then why not thou?

"Year," I said, "thou shalt not lack
Bribes to bar thy coming back;
Doth old Egypt wear her best
In the chambers of her rest?
Doth she take to her last bed
Beaten gold, and glorious red?

Envy not! for thou wilt wear
In the dark a shroud as fair;
Golden with the sunny ray
Thou withdrawest from my day;
Wrought upon with colors fine,
Stolen from this life of mine:
Like the dusty Lybian kings,
Lie with two wide open wings
On thy breast, as if to say,
On these wings hope flew away.
And so housed, and thus adorned,
Not forgotten, but not scorned,
Let the dark for evermore
Close thee when I close the door;
And the dust for ages fall
In the creases of thy pall;
And no voice nor visit rude
Break thy sealèd solitude."

I took the year out of my life and story,
The dead year, and said, "I have hewed thee a tomb
'All the kings of the nations lie in glory;'
Cased in cedar, and shut in a sacred gloom;
But for the sword, and the sceptre, and diadem,
Sure thou didst reign like them."
So I laid her with those tyrants old and hoary,
According to my vow;
For I said, "The kings of the nations lie in glory,
And so shalt thou!"

"Rock," I said, "thy ribs are strong,
That I bring thee guard it long;
Hide the light from buried eyes —
Hide it, lest the dead arise."
"Year," I said, and turned away,
"I am free of thee this day;
All that we two only know,
I forgive and I forego;
So thy face no more I meet,
In the field or in the street."

Thus we parted, she and I;
Life hid death, and put it by;
Life hid death, and said, "Be free!
I have no more need of thee."
No more need! O, mad mistake,
With repentance in its wake!
Ignorant, and rash, and blind;
Life had left the grave behind;
But had locked within its hold,
With the spices and the gold,
All she had to keep her warm
In the raging of the storm.

Scarce the sunset bloom was gone,
And the little stars outshone,
Ere the dead year, stiff and stark,
Drew me to her in the dark;
Death drew life to come to her,

Beating at her sepulchre,
Crying out, "How can I part
With the best share of my heart;
Lo, it lies upon the bier,
Captive, with the buried year.
O my heart!" And I fell prone,
Weeping at the sealèd stone;
"Year among the shades," I said,
"Since I live, and thou art dead,
Let my captive heart be free,
Like a bird to fly to me."
And I stayed some voice to win,
But none answered from within;
And I kissed the door, — and night
Deepened till the stars waxed bright;
And I saw them set and wane,
And the world turn green again.

"So," I whispered, "open door,
I must tread this palace floor;
Sealèd palace, rich and dim —
Let a narrow sunbeam swim
After me, and on me spread
While I look upon my dead;
Let a little warmth be free
To come after; let me see
Through the doorway when I sit
Looking out, the swallows flit,
Settling not till daylight goes;

Let me smell the wild white rose,
Smell the woodbine and the may;
Mark, upon a sunny day,
Sated from their blossoms rise,
Honey-bees and butterflies.
Let me hear, O! let me hear,
Sitting by my buried year,
Finches chirping to their young,
And the little noises flung
Out of clefts where rabbits play,
Or from falling water spray;
And the gracious echoes woke
By man's work: the woodman's stroke,
Shout of shepherd, whistlings blithe,
And the whetting of the scythe;
Let this be, lest shut and furled
From the well-belovèd world,
I forget her yearnings old,
And her troubles manifold;
Strivings sore, submissions meet,
And my pulse no longer beat,
Keeping time and bearing part
With the pulse of her great heart.

"So; swing open door, and shade
Take me; I am not afraid,
For the time will not be long;
Soon I shall have waxen strong —
Strong enough my own to win
From the grave it lies within."

And I entered. On her bier
Quiet lay the buried year;
I sat down where I could see
Life without, and sunshine free,
Death within. And I between,
Waited my own heart to wean
From the shroud that shaded her
In the rock-hewn sepulchre;
Waited till the dead should say,
"Heart be free of me this day" —
Waited with a patient will —
AND I WAIT BETWEEN THEM STILL.

I take the year back to my life and story,
The dead year, and say, "I will share in thy tomb.
'All the kings of the nations lie in glory;'
Cased in cedar, and shut in a sacred gloom;
They reigned in their lifetime with sceptre and diadem,
But thou excellest them;
For life doth make thy grave her oratory,
And the crown is still on thy brow;
'All the kings of the nations lie in glory,'
And so dost thou."

REFLECTIONS.

Written for The Portfolio Society, July 1862

LOOKING OVER A GATE AT A POOL IN A FIELD.

WHAT change has made the pastures sweet,
And reached the daisies at my feet,
And cloud that wears a golden hem?
This lovely world, the hills, the sward —
They all look fresh, as if our Lord
But yesterday had finished them.

And here's the field with light aglow;
How fresh its boundary lime-trees show,
And how its wet leaves trembling shine!
Between their trunks come through to me
The morning sparkles of the sea
Below the level browsing line.

I see the pool more clear by half
Than pools where other waters laugh
Up at the breasts of coot and rail.

There, as she passed it on her way,
I saw reflected yesterday
A maiden with a milking-pail.

There, neither slowly nor in haste,
One hand upon her slender waist,
The other lifted to her pail,
She rosy in the morning light,
Among the water-daisies white,
Like some fair sloop, appeared to sail.

Against her ankles as she trod
The lucky buttercups did nod.
I leaned upon the gate to see:
The sweet thing looked but did not speak;
A dimple came in either cheek,
And all my heart was gone from me.

Then, as I lingered on the gate,
And she came up like coming fate,
I saw my picture in her eyes —
Clear dancing eyes, more black than sloes,
Cheeks like the mountain pink, that grows
Among white-headed majesties.

I said, "A tale was made of old
That I would fain to thee unfold;
Ah! let me — let me tell the tale."
But high she held her comely head;

"I cannot heed it now," she said,
"For carrying of the milking-pail."

She laughed. What good to make ado?
I held the gate and she came through,
And took her homeward path anon.
From the clear pool her face had fled;
It rested on my heart instead,
Reflected when the maid was gone.

With happy youth, and work content,
So sweet and stately on she went,
Right careless of the untold tale.
Each step she took I loved her more,
And followed to her dairy door
The maiden with the milking-pail.

II.

For hearts where wakened love doth lurk,
How fine, how blest a thing is work!
For work does good when reasons fail.
Good, yet the axe at every stroke
The echo of a name awoke —
Her name is Mary Martindale.

I'm glad that echo was not heard
Aright by other men: a bird
Knows doubtless what his own notes tell;
And I know not; but I can say

I felt as shame-faced all that day
As if folks heard her name right well.

And when the west began to glow
I went — I could not choose but go
To that same dairy on the hill;
And while sweet Mary moved about
Within, I came to her without,
And leaned upon the window-sill.

The garden border where I stood
Was sweet with pinks and southernwood.
I spoke — her answer seemed to fail:
I smelt the pinks — I could not see;
The dusk came down and sheltered me,
And in the dusk she heard my tale.

And what is left that I should tell?
I begged a kiss, I pleaded well:
The rosebud lips did long decline;
But yet I think, I think 'tis true,
That leaned at last into the dew,
One little instant they were mine.

O life! how dear thou hast become:
She laughed at dawn and I was dumb,
But evening counsels best prevail.
Fair shine the blue that o'er her spreads
Green be the pastures where she treads,
The maiden with the milking-pail!

THE LETTER L.

ABSENT.

WE sat on grassy slopes that meet
With sudden dip the level strand;
The trees hung overhead — our feet
Were on the sand.

Two silent girls, a thoughtful man,
We sunned ourselves in open light,
And felt such April airs as fan
The Isle of Wight.

And smelt the wall-flower in the crag
Whereon that dainty waft had fed,
Which made the bell-hung cowslip wag
Her delicate head.

And let alighting jackdaws fleet
Adown it open-winged, and pass
Till they could touch with outstretched feet
The warmèd grass.

The happy wave ran up and rang
Like service bells a long way off,
And down a little freshet sprang
From mossy trough,

And splashed into a rain of spray,
And fretted on with daylight's loss,
Because so many bluebells lay
Leaning across.

Blue martins gossiped in the sun;
And pairs of chattering daws flew by
And sailing brigs rocked softly on
In company.

Wild cherry-boughs above us spread,
The whitest shade was ever seen,
And flicker, flicker, came and fled
Sun-spots between.

Bees murmured in the milk-white bloom,
As babes will sigh for deep content,
When their sweet hearts for peace make room,
As given, not lent.

And we saw on: we said no word,
And one was lost in musings rare,
One buoyant as the waft that stirred
Her shining hair.

His eyes were bent upon the sand,
Unfathomed deeps within them lay,
A slender rod was in his hand —
A hazel spray.

Her eyes were resting on his face,
As shyly glad by stealth to glean
Impressions of his manly grace
And guarded mien.

The mouth with steady sweetness set,
And eyes conveying unaware
The distant hint of some regret
That harbored there.

She gazed, and in the tender flush
That made her face like roses blown,
And in the radiance and the hush
Her thought was shown.

It was a happy thing to sit
So near, nor mar his reverie;
She looked not for a part in it,
So meek was she.

But it was solace for her eyes,
And for her heart, that yearned to him,
To watch apart in loving wise
Those musings dim.

Lost — lost, and gone! The Pelham woods
Were full of doves that cooed at ease;
The foxglove filled a hundred hoods
With dainty bees.

He heard not; all the delicate air
Was fresh with falling water-spray:
It mattered not — he was not there,
But far away.

Till with the hazel in his hand,
Still drowned in thought it thus befell;
He drew a letter on the sand —
The letter L.

And looking on it, straight there wrought
A ruddy flush about his brow;
His letter woke him: absent thought
Rushed homeward now.

And half-abashed, his hasty touch
Effaced it with a tell-tale care,
As if his action had been much,
And not his air.

And she? she watched his open palm
Smooth out the letter from the sand,
And rose, with aspect almost calm,
And filled her hand

With cherry-bloom, and moved away
To gather wild forget-me-not,
And let her errant footsteps stray
To one sweet spot.

As if she coveted the fair
White lining of the silver-weed,
And cuckoo-pint that shaded there
Empurpled seed.

She had not feared, as I divine,
Because she had not hoped. Alas!
The sorrow of it! for that sign
Came but to pass;

And yet it robbed her of the right
To give, who looked not to receive,
And made her blush in love's despite
That she should grieve.

A shape in white, she turned to gaze;
Her eyes were shaded with her hand,
And half-way up the winding ways
We saw her stand.

Green hollows of the fringèd cliff,
Red rocks that under waters show,
Blue reaches, and a sailing skiff,
Were spread below.

She stood to gaze, perhaps to sigh,
Perhaps to think; but who can tell
How heavy on her heart must lie
The letter L!

She came anon with quiet grace,
And "What," she murmured, "silent yet!
He answered, "'Tis a haunted place,
And spell-beset.

"O speak to us, and break the spell!"
"The spell is broken," she replied.
"I crossed the running brook, it fell,
It could not bide.

"And I have brought a budding world,
Of orchis spires and daisies rank,
And ferny plumes but half uncurled,
From yonder bank;

"And I shall weave of them a crown,
And at the well-head launch it free,
That so the brook may float it down,
And out to sea.

"There may it to some English hands
From fairy meadow seem to come;
The fairyest of fairy lands —
The land of home."

"Weave on," he said, and as she wove
We told how currents in the deep,
With branches from a lemon grove,
Blue bergs will sweep.

And messages from shipwrecked folk
Will navigate the moon-led main,
And painted boards of splintered oak
Their port regain.

Then floated out by vagrant thought,
My soul beheld on torrid sand
The wasteful water set at nought
Man's skilful hand,

And suck out gold-dust from the box,
And wash it down in weedy whirls,
And split the wine-keg on the rocks,
And lose the pearls.

"Ah! why to that which needs it not,"
Methought, "should costly things be given!
How much is wasted, wrecked, forgot,
On this side heaven!"

So musing, did mine ears awake
To maiden tones of sweet reserve,
And manly speech that seemed to make
The steady curve

Of lips that uttered it defer
Their guard, and soften for the thought:
She listened, and his talk with her
Was fancy fraught.

"There is not much in liberty" —
With doubtful pauses he began;
And said to her and said to me,
"There was a man —

There was a man who dreamed one night
That his dead father came to him;
And said, when fire was low, and light
Was burning dim —

'Why vagrant thus, my sometime pride,
Unloved, unloving, wilt thou roam?
Sure home is best!' The son replied,
'I have no home.'

"'Shall not I speak?' his father said,
'Who early chose a youthful wife,
And worked for her, and with her led
My happy life.

"'Ay, I will speak, for I was young
As thou art now, when I did hold
The prattling sweetness of thy tongue
Dearer than gold;

And rosy from thy noonday sleep
Would bear thee to admiring kin,
And all thy pretty looks would keep
My heart within.

"'Then after, mid thy young allies —
For thee ambition flushed my brow —
I coveted the school-boy prize
Far more than thou.

"'I thought for thee, I thought for all
My gamesome imps that round me grew;
The dews of blessing heaviest fall
Where care falls too.

"'And I that sent my boys away,
In youthful strength to earn their bread,
And died before the hair was gray
Upon my head —

"'I say to thee, though free from care,
A lonely lot, an aimless life,
The crowning comfort is not there —
Son, take a wife.'

"'Father beloved,' the son replied,
And failed to gather to his breast,
With arms in darkness searching wide,
The formless guest.

"'I am but free, as sorrow is,
To dry her tears, to laugh, to talk;
And free, as sick men are, I wis
To rise and walk.

"'And free, as poor men are, to buy
If they have nought wherewith to pay;
Nor hope the debt before they die
To wipe away.

"'What 'vails it there are wives to win,
And faithful hearts for those to yearn,
Who find not ought thereto akin
To make return?

"'Shall he take much who little gives,
And dwell in spirit far away,
When she that in his presence lives
Doth never stray,

"'But waking, guideth as beseems
The happy house in order trim,
And tends her babes; and sleeping, dreams
Of them and him?

" O base, O cold,' " — while thus he spake
The dream broke off, the vision fled;
He carried on his speech awake,
And sighing said —

"'I had — ah happy man! — I had
A precious jewel in my breast,
And while I kept it I was glad
At work, at rest!

"'Call it a heart, and call it strong
As upward stroke of eagle's wing;
Then call it weak, you shall not wrong
The beating thing.

"'In tangles of the jungle reed,
Whose heats are lit with tiger eyes,
In shipwreck drifting with the weed
'Neath rainy skies.

"'Still youthful manhood, fresh and keen,
At danger gazed with awed delight,
As if sea would not drown, I ween,
Nor serpent bite.

"'I had — ah happy! but 'tis gone,
The priceless jewel; one came by,
And saw and stood awhile to con
With curious eye,

"'And wished for it, and faintly smiled
From under lashes black as doom,
With subtle sweetness, tender, mild,
That did illume,

"'The perfect face, and shed on it
A charm, half feeling, half surprise,
And brim with dreams, the exquisite
Brown blessèd eyes.

"'Was it for this, no more but this,
I took and laid it in her hand,
By dimples ruled, to hint submiss,
By frown unmanned?

"'It was for this — and O farewell
The fearless foot, the present mind,
And steady will to breast the swell
And face the wind!

"'I gave the jewel from my breast,
She played with it a little while
As I sailed down into the west,
Fed by her smile:

"'Then weary of it — far from land,
With sigh as deep as destiny,
She let it drop from her fair hand
Into the sea,

"'And watched it sink; and I — and I, —
What shall I do, for all is vain?
No wave will bring, no gold will buy,
No toil attain;

"'Nor any diver reach to raise
My jewel from the blue abyss;
Or could they, still I should but praise
Their work amiss.

"'Thrown, thrown away! But I love yet
The fair, fair hand which did the deed
That wayward sweetness to forget
Were bitter meed.

"'No, let it lie, and let the wave
Roll over it for evermore;
Whelmed where the sailor hath his grave
The sea her store.

"'My heart, my sometime happy heart!
And O for once let me complain,
I must forego life's better part —
Man's dearer gain.

"'I worked afar that I might rear
A peaceful home on English soil;
I labored for the gold and gear —
I loved my toil

"'Forever in my spirit spake
The natural whisper, "Well 'twill be
When loving wife and children break
Their bread with thee!"

"'The gathered gold is turned to dross,
The wife hath faded into air,
My heart is thrown away, my loss
I cannot spare.

"'Not spare unsated thought her food —
No, not one rustle of the fold
Nor scent of eastern sandal-wood
Nor gleam of gold;

"'Nor quaint devices of the shawl,
Far less the drooping lashes meek;
The gracious figure, lithe and tall,
The dimpled cheek;

"'And all the wonders of her eyes,
And sweet caprices of her air,
Albeit, indignant reason cries,
Fool! have a care.

"'Fool! join not madness to mistake;
Thou knowest she loved thee not a whit;
Only that she thy heart might break
She wanted it.

"'Only the conquered thing to chain
So fast that none might set it free,
Nor other woman there might reign
And comfort thee.

"'Robbed, robbed of life's illusions sweet;
Love dead outside her closèd door,
And passion fainting at her feet,
To wake no more.

"'What canst thou give that unknown bride
Whom thou didst work for in the waste,
Ere fated love was born, and cried —
Was dead, ungraced?

"'No more but this, the partial care,
The natural kindness for its own,
The trust that waxeth unaware.
As worth is known?

"'Observance, and complacent thought
Indulgent, and the honor due
That many another man has brought
Who brought love too?

"'Nay, then, forbid it heaven!' he said,
'The saintly vision fades from me;
O bands and chains! I cannot wed —
I am not free.'"

With that he raised his face to view;
"What think you," asking, "of my tale?
And was he right to let the dew
Of morn exhale,

"And burdened in the noontide sun,
The grateful shade of home forego —
Could he be right — I ask as one
Who fain would know?"

He spoke to her and spoke to me;
The rebel rose-hue dyed her cheek;
The woven crown lay on her knee;
She would not speak.

And I with doubtful pause — averse
To let occasion drift away —
I answered — "If his case were worse
Than word can say,

"Time is a healer of sick hearts,
And women have been known to choose,
With purpose to allay their smarts,
And tend their bruise,

"These for themselves. Content to give,
In their own lavish love complete,
Taking for sole prerogative
Their tendance sweet.

"Such meeting in their diadem
Of crowning love's ethereal fire,
Himself he robs who robbeth them
Of their desire.

"Therefore the man who, dreaming, cried
Against his lot that even-song,
I judge him honest, and decide
That he was wrong."

"When I am judged, ah may my fate,"
He whispered, "in thy code be read!
Be thou both judge and advocate."
Then turned, he said —

"Fair weaver!" touching, while he spoke,
The woven crown, the weaving hand;
"And do you this decree revoke,
Or may it stand?

"This friend, you ever think her right —
She is not wrong, then?" Soft and low
The little trembling word took flight:
She answered, "No."

PRESENT.

A meadow where the grass was deep,
  Rich, square, and golden to the view,
A belt of elms with level sweep
    About it grew.

The sun beat down on it; the line
  Of shade was clear beneath the trees;
There, by a clustering eglantine,
    We sat at ease.

And O the buttercups! that field
  O' the cloth of gold, where pennons swam —
Where France set up his lilied shield,
    His oriflamb,

And Henry's lion-standard rolled:
  What was it to their matchless sheen,
Their million million drops of gold
    Among the green!

We sat at ease in peaceful trust,
  For he had written, "Let us meet;
My wife grew tired of smoke and dust,
    And London heat,

"And I have found a quiet grange,
Set back in meadows sloping west,
And there our little ones can range
And she can rest.

"Come down, that we may show the view,
And she may hear your voice again,
And talk her woman's talk with you
Along the lane."

Since he had drawn with listless hand
The letter, six long years had fled,
And winds had blown about the sand,
And they were wed.

Two rosy urchins near him played,
Or watched, entranced, the shapely ships
That with his knife for them he made
Of elder slips.

And where the flowers were thickest shed,
Each blossom like a burnished gem,
A creeping baby reared its head,
And cooed at them.

And calm was on the father's face,
And love was in the mother's eyes;
She looked and listened from her place,
In tender wise.

She did not need to raise her voice
That they might hear, she sat so nigh;
Yet we could speak when 'twas our choice,
And soft reply.

Holding our quiet talk apart
Of household things; till, all unsealed,
The guarded outworks of the heart
Began to yield;

And much that prudence will not dip
The pen to fix and send away,
Passed safely over from the lip
That summer day.

"I should be happy," with a look
Towards her husband where he lay,
Lost in the pages of his book,
Soft did she say.

"I am, and yet no lot below
For one whole day eludeth care;
To marriage all the stories flow,
And finish there:

"As if with marriage came the end,
The entrance into settled rest,
The calm to which love's tossings tend,
The quiet breast.

"For me love played the low preludes,
Yet life began but with the ring,
Such infinite solicitudes
Around it cling.

"I did not for my heart divine
Her destiny so meek to grow;
The higher nature matched with mine
Will have it so.

"Still I consider it, and still
Acknowledge it my master made,
Above me by the steadier will
Of nought afraid.

"Above me by the candid speech;
The temperate judgment of its own;
The keener thoughts that grasp and reach
At things unknown.

"But I look up and he looks down,
And thus our married eyes can meet;
Unclouded his, and clear of frown,
And gravely sweet.

"And yet, O good, O wise and true!
I would for all my fealty,
That I could be as much to you
As you to me;

"And knew the deep secure content
Of wives who have been hardly won,
And, long petitioned, gave assent,
Jealous of none.

"But proudly sure in all the earth
No other in that homage shares,
Nor other woman's face or worth
Is prized as theirs."

I said: "And yet no lot below
For one whole day eludeth care.
Your thoughts." She answered, "Even so,
I would beware.

"Regretful questionings; be sure
That very seldom do they rise,
Nor for myself do I endure —
I sympathize.

"For once" — she turned away her head,
Across the grass she swept her hand —
"There was a letter once," she said,
"Upon the sand."

"There was, in truth, a letter writ
On sand," I said, "and swept from view;
But that same hand which fashioned it
Is given to you.

"Efface the letter; wherefore keep
An image which the sands forego?"
"Albeit that fear had seemed to sleep,"
She answered low.

"I could not choose but wake it now;
For do but turn aside your face,
A house on yonder hilly brow
Your eyes may trace.

"The chestnuts shelter it; ah me,
That I should have so faint a heart!
But yester-eve, as by the sea,
I sat apart,

"I heard a name, I saw a hand
Of passing stranger point that way —
And will he meet her on the strand?
When late we stray;

"For she is come, for she is there,
I heard it in the dusk, and heard
Admiring words, that named her fair,
But little stirred

"By beauty of the wood and wave,
And weary of an old man's sway;
For it was sweeter to enslave
Than to obey."

— The voice of one that near us stood,
The rustle of a silken fold,
A scent of eastern sandalwood,
A gleam of gold!

A lady! In the narrow space
Between the husband and the wife,
But nearest him — she showed a face
With dangers rife;

A subtle smile that dimpling fled,
As night-black lashes rose and fell:
I looked, and to myself I said,
"The letter L."

He, too, looked up, and with arrest
Of breath and motion held his gaze,
Nor cared to hide within his breast
His deep amaze;

Nor spoke till on her near advance
His dark cheek flushed a ruddier hue;
And with his change of countenance
Hers altered too.

"Lenore!" his voice was like the cry
Of one entreating; and he said
But that — then paused with such a sigh
As mourns the dead.

And seated near, with no demur
Of bashful doubt she silence broke,
Though I alone could answer her
When first she spoke.

She looked: her eyes were beauty's own;
She shed their sweetness into his;
Nor spared the married wife one moan
That bitterest is.

She spoke, and lo her loveliness
Methought she damaged with her tongue;
And every sentence made it less,
So false they rung.

The rallying voice, the light demand,
Half flippant, half unsatisfied;
The vanity sincere and bland —
The answers wide.

And now her talk was of the East,
And next her talk was of the sea;
"And has the love for it increased
You shared with me?"

He answered not, but grave and still
With earnest eyes her face perused,
And locked his lips with steady will,
As one that mused —

That mused and wondered, why his gaze
Should dwell on her methought was plain
But reason that should wonder raise
I sought in vain.

And near and near the children drew,
Attracted by her rich array,
And gems that trembling into view
Like raindrops lay.

He spoke: the wife her baby took
And pressed the little face to hers;
What pain soe'er her bosom shook,
What jealous stirs

Might stab her heart, she hid them so,
The cooing babe a veil supplied;
And if she listened none might know,
Or if she sighed;

Or if forecasting grief and care
Unconscious solace thence she drew,
And lulled her babe, and unaware
Lulled sorrow too.

The lady, she interpreter
For looks or language wanted none,
If yet dominion stayed with her —
So lightly won;

If yet the heart she wounded sore
Could yearn to her, and let her see
The homage that was evermore
Disloyalty;

If sign would yield that it had bled,
Or rallied from the faithless blow,
Or sick or sullen stooped to wed,
She craved to know.

Now dreamy deep, now sweetly keen,
Her asking eyes would round him shine;
But guarded lips and settled mien
Refused the sign.

And unbeguiled and unbetrayed
The wonder yet within his breast,
It seemed a watchful part he played
Against her quest.

Until with accent of regret
She touched upon the past once more,
As if she dared him to forget
His dream of yore.

And words of little weight let fall
The fancy of the lower mind;
How waxing life must needs leave all
Its best behind;

How he had said that "he would fain
(One morning on the halcyon sea)
That life would at a stand remain
Eternally;

"And sails be mirrored in the deep,
As then they were, for evermore,
And happy spirits wake and sleep
Afar from shore;

"The well-contented heart be fed
Ever as then, and all the world
(It were not small) unshadowed
When sails were furled.

"Your words" — a pause, and quietly
With touch of calm self-ridicule:
"It may be so — for then," said he,
"I was a fool."

With that he took his book, and left
An awkward silence to my care,
That soon I filled with questions deft
And debonair;

And slid into an easy vein,
The favorite picture of the year;
The grouse upon her lord's domain —
The salmon weir;

Till she could fain a sudden thought
Upon neglected guests, and rise,
And make us her adieux, with nought
In her dark eyes

Acknowledging or shame or pain;
But just unveiling for our view
A little smile of still disdain
As she withdrew.

Then nearer did the sunshine creep,
And warmer came the wafting breeze;
The little babe was fast asleep
On mother's knees.

Fair was the face that o'er it leant,
The cheeks with beauteous blushes dyed
The downcast lashes, shyly bent,
That failed to hide

Some tender shame. She did not see;
She felt his eyes that would not stir,
She looked upon her babe, and he
So looked at her.

So grave, so wondering, so content,
As one new waked to conscious life,
Whose sudden joy with fear is blent,
He said, "My wife."

"My wife, how beautiful you are!"
Then closer at her side reclined,
"The bold brown woman from afar
Comes, to me blind.

"And by comparison, I see
The majesty of matron grace,
And learn how pure, how fair can be
My own wife's face:

"Pure with all faithful passion, fair
With tender smiles that come and go;
And comforting as April air
After the snow.

"Fool that I was! my spirit frets
And marvels at the humbling truth,
That I have deigned to spend regrets
On my bruised youth."

Its idol mocked thee, seated nigh,
And shamed me for the mad mistake;
I thank my God he could deny,
And she forsake.

Ah, who am I, that God hath saved
Me from the doom I did desire,
And crossed the lot myself had craved,
To set me higher!

"What have I done that He should bow
From heaven to choose a wife for me?
And what deserved, he should endow
My home with THEE.

"My wife!" With that she turned her face
To kiss the hand about her neck;
And I went down and sought the place
Where leaped the beck —

The busy beck, that still would run
And fall, and falter its refrain;
And pause and shimmer in the sun,
And fall again.

It led me to the sandy shore,
We sang together, it and I —
"The daylight comes, the dark is o'er,
The shadows fly."

I lost it on the sandy shore.
"O wife!" its latest murmurs fell,
"O wife be glad, and fear no more
The letter L."

THE HIGH TIDE ON THE COAST OF LINCOLNSHIRE.

(1571.)

THE old mayor climbed the belfry tower,
The ringers ran by two, by three;
"Pull, if ye never pulled before;
Good ringers, pull your best," quoth he.
"Play uppe, play uppe, O Boston bells!
Ply all your changes, all your swells,
Play uppe 'The Brides of Enderby.'"

Men say it was a stolen tyde —
The Lord that sent it, He knows all;
But in myne ears doth still abide
The message that the bells let fall:
And there was nought of strange, beside
The flights of mews and peewits pied
By millions crouched on the old sea wall.

I sat and spun within the doore,
My thread brake off, I raised myne eyes
The level sun, like ruddy ore,
Lay sinking in the barren skies;

And dark against day's golden death
She moved where Lindis wandereth,
My sonne's faire wife, Elizabeth.

"Cusha! Cusha! Cusha!" calling,
Ere the early dews were falling,
Farre away I heard her song.
"Cusha! Cusha!" all along;
Where the reedy Lindis floweth
Floweth, floweth,
From the meads where melick groweth
Faintly came her milking song. —

"Cusha! Cusha! Cusha!" calling,
"For the dews will soone be falling;
Leave your meadow grasses mellow,
Mellow, mellow;
Quit your cowslips, cowslips yellow;
Come uppe Whitefoot, come uppe Lightfoot
Quit the stalks of parsley hollow,
Hollow, hollow;
Come uppe Jetty, rise and follow,
From the clovers lift your head;
Come uppe Whitefoot, come uppe Lightfoot,
Come uppe Jetty, rise and follow,
Jetty, to the milking shed."

If it be long, aye, long ago,
When I beginne to think howe long,

Againe I hear the Lindis flow,
Swift as an arrowe, sharpe and strong;
And all the aire it seemeth mee
Bin full of floating bells (sayth shee),
That ring the tune of Enderby.

Alle fresh the level pasture lay,
And not a shadowe mote be seene,
Save where full fyve good miles away
The steeple towered from out the greene
And lo! the great bell farre and wide
Was heard in all the country side
That Saturday at eventide.

The swannerds where their sedges are
Moved on in sunset's golden breath,
The shepherde lads I heard afarre,
And my sonne's wife, Elizabeth;
Till floating o'er the grassy sea
Came downe that kyndly message free,
The "Brides of Mavis Enderby."

Then some looked uppe into the sky,
And all along where Lindis flows
To where the goodly vessels lie,
And where the lordly steeple shows.
They sayde, "And why should this thing be,
What danger lowers by land or sea?
They ring the tune of Enderby!

"For evil news from Mablethorpe,
Of pyrate galleys warping down;
For shippes ashore beyond the scorpe,
They have not spared to wake the towne
But while the west bin red to see,
And storms be none, and pyrates flee,
Why ring 'The Brides of Enderby?'"

I looked without, and lo! my sonne
Came riding downe with might and main
He raised a shout as he drew on,
Till all the welkin rang again,
"Elizabeth! Elizabeth!"
(A sweeter woman ne'er drew breath
Than my sonne's wife, Elizabeth.)

"The olde sea wall (he cried) is downe,
The rising tide comes on apace,
And boats adrift in yonder towne
Go sailing uppe the market-place."
He shook as one that looks on death:
"God save you, mother!" straight he saith;
"Where is my wife, Elizabeth?"

"Good sonne, where Lindis winds away
With her two bairns I marked her long;
And ere yon bells beganne to play
Afar I heard her milking song."
He looked across the grassy sea,

To right, to left, "Ho Enderby!"
They rang "The Brides of Enderby!"

With that he cried and beat his breast;
For lo! along the river's bed
A mighty eygre reared his crest,
And uppe the Lindis raging sped.
It swept with thunderous noises loud;
Shaped like a curling snow-white cloud,
Or like a demon in a shroud.

And rearing Lindis backward pressed,
Shook all her trembling bankes amaine;
Then madly at the eygre's breast
Flung uppe her weltering walls again.
Then bankes came downe with ruin and rout –
Then beaten foam flew round about —
Then all the mighty floods were out.

So farre, so fast the eygre drave,
The heart had hardly time to beat,
Before a shallow seething wave
Sobbed in the grasses at oure feet:
The feet had hardly time to flee
Before it brake against the knee,
And all the world was in the sea.

Upon the roofe we sate that night,
The noise of bells went sweeping by:

I marked the lofty beacon light
Stream from the church tower, red and high —
A lurid mark and dread to see;
And awsome bells they were to mee,
That in the dark rang "Enderby."

They rang the sailor lads to guide
From roofe to roofe who fearless rowed;
And I — my sonne was at my side,
And yet the ruddy beacon glowed:
And yet he moaned beneath his breath,
"O come in life, or come in death!
O lost! my love, Elizabeth."

And didst thou visit him no more?
Thou didst, thou didst my daughter deare
The waters laid thee at his doore,
Ere yet the early dawn was clear.
Thy pretty bairns in fast embrace,
The lifted sun shone on thy face,
Downe drifted to thy dwelling-place.

That flow strewed wrecks about the grass,
That ebbe swept out the flocks to sea;
A fatal ebbe and flow, alas!
To manye more than myne and me:
But each will mourn his own (she saith).
And sweeter woman ne'er drew breath
Than my sonne's wife, Elizabeth.

I shall never hear her more
By the reedy Lindis shore,
"Cusha, Cusha, Cusha!" calling,
Ere the early dews be falling;
I shall never hear her song,
"Cusha, Cusha!" all along,
Where the sunny Lindis floweth,
Goeth, floweth;
From the meads where melick groweth,
When the water winding down,
Onward floweth to the town.

I shall never see her more
Where the reeds and rushes quiver,
Shiver, quiver;
Stand beside the sobbing river,
Sobbing, throbbing, in its falling,
To the sandy lonesome shore;
I shall never hear her calling,
"Leave your meadow grasses mellow,
Mellow, mellow;
Quit your cowslips, cowslips yellow;
Come uppe Whitefoot, come uppe Lightfoot;
Quit your pipes of parsley hollow,
Hollow, hollow;
Come uppe Lightfoot, rise and follow;
Lightfoot, Whitefoot,
From your clovers lift the head;
Come uppe Jetty, follow, follow,
Jetty, to the milking shed."

AFTERNOON AT A PARSONAGE.

(THE PARSON'S BROTHER, SISTER, AND TWO CHILDREN.)

Preface.

WHAT wonder man should fail to stay
A nursling wafted from above,
The growth celestial come astray,
That tender growth whose name is Love.

It is as if high winds in heaven
Had shaken the celestial trees,
And to this earth below had given
Some feathered seeds from one of these.

O perfect love that 'dureth long!
Dear growth, that shaded by the palms,
And breathed on by the angel's song,
Blooms on in heaven, secure from harms!

How great the task to guard thee here,
Where wind is rough and frost is keen,
And all the ground with doubt and fear
Is checkered, birth and death between!

Space is against thee — it can part;
Time is against thee — it can chill;
Words — they but render half the heart;
Deeds — they are poor to our rich will.

Merton. Though she had loved me, I had never bound
Her beauty to my darkness; that had been
Too hard for her. Sadder to look so near
Into a face all shadow, than to stand
Aloof, and then withdraw, and afterwards
Suffer forgetfulness to comfort her.
I think so, and I loved her; therefore I
Have no complaint; albeit she is not mine:
And yet — and yet, withdrawing I would fain
She would have pleaded duty — would have said
"My father wills it"; would have turned away,
As lingering, or unwillingly; for then
She would have done no damage to the past:
Now she has roughly used it — flung it down
And brushed its bloom away. If she had said,
"Sir, I have promised; therefore, lo! my hand" —
Would I have taken it? Ah no! by all
Most sacred, no!
I would for my sole share
Have taken first her recollected blush
The day I won her; next her shining tears —
The tears of our long parting — and for all

The rest — her cry, her bitter heart-sick cry,
That day or night (I know not which it was,
The days being always night), that darkest night,
When being led to her I heard her cry,
"O blind! blind! blind!"
Go with thy chosen mate,
The fashion of thy going nearly cured
The sorrow of it; I am yet so weak
That half my thoughts go after thee; but not
So weak that I desire to have it so.

JESSIE, *seated at the piano, sings.*

When the dimpled water slippeth,
  Full of laughter on its way,
And her wing the wagtail dippeth,
  Running by the brink at play;
When the poplar leaves atremble
  Turn their edges to the light,
And the far-up clouds resemble
  Veils of gauze most clear and white;
And the sunbeams fall and flatter,
  Woodland moss and branches brown,
And the glossy finches chatter
  Up and down, up and down:
Though the heart be not attending,
  Having music of her own,
On the grass, through meadows wending,
  It is sweet to walk alone.

When the falling waters utter
  Something mournful on their way,
And departing swallows flutter,

Taking leave of bank and brae;
When the chaffinch idly sitteth
With her mate upon the sheaves,
And the wistful robin flitteth
Over beds of yellow leaves;
When the clouds, like ghosts that ponder
Evil fate, float by and frown,
And the listless wind doth wander
Up and down, up and down:
Though the heart be not attending,
Having sorrows of her own,
Through the fields and fallows wending,
It is sad to walk alone.

Merton. Blind! blind! blind!
Oh! sitting in the dark for evermore,
And doing nothing — putting out a hand
To feel what lies about me, and to say
Not "This is blue or red," but "This is cold,
And this the sun is shining on, and this
I know not till they tell its name to me."

O that I might behold once more my God,
The shining rulers of the night and day;
Or a star twinkling; or an almond-tree
Pink with her blossom and alive with bees,
Standing against the azure! O my sight!
Lost, and yet living in the sunlit cells
Of memory — that only lightsome place
Where lingers yet the dayspring of my youth
The years of mourning for thy death are long.

Be kind, sweet memory! O desert me not!
For oft thou show'st me lucent opal seas,
Fringed with their cocoa-palms and dwarf-red crags,
Whereon the placid moon doth "rest her chin";
For oft by favor of thy visitings
I feel the dimness of an Indian night,
And lo! the sun is coming. Red as rust
Between the latticed blind his presence burns,
A ruby ladder running up the wall;
And all the dust, printed with pigeons' feet,
Is reddened, and the crows that stalk anear
Begin to trail for heat their glossy wings,
And the red flowers give back at once the dew,
For night is gone, and day is born so fast,
And is so strong that, huddled as in flight,
The fleeting darkness paleth to a shade,
And while she calls to sleep and dreams "Come on,"
Suddenly waked, the sleepers rub their eyes,
Which having opened, lo! she is no more.

O misery and mourning! I have felt —
Yes, I have felt like some deserted world
That God had done with, and had cast aside
To rock and stagger through the gulfs of space,
He never looking on it any more —
Untilled, no use, no pleasure, not desired,
Nor lighted on by angels in their flight
From heaven to happier planets, and the race
That once had dwelt on it withdrawn or dead.

Could such a world have hope that some blest day
God would remember her, and fashion her
Anew?

Jessie. What, dearest? Did you speak to me?

Child. I think he spoke to us.

M. No, little elves,
You were so quiet that I half forgot
Your neighborhood. What are you doing there?

J. They sit together on the window-mat
Nursing their dolls.

C. Yes, Uncle, our new dolls —
Our best dolls, that you gave us.

M. Did you say
The afternoon was bright?

J. Yes, bright indeed!
The sun is on the plane-tree, and it flames
All red and orange.

C. I can see my father —
Look! look! the leaves are falling on his gown.

M. Where?

C. In the churchyard, Uncle — he is gone;
He passed behind the tower.

M. I heard a bell:
There is a funeral, then, behind the church.

2*d Child.* Are the trees sorry when their leaves drop off?

1*st Child.* You talk such silly words; — no, not at all.
There goes another leaf.

2*d Child.* I did not see.

1*st Child.* Look! on the grass, between the little hills,
Just where they planted Amy.

J. Amy died —
Dear little Amy! when you talk of her
Say, she is gone to heaven.

2*d Child.* They planted her —
Will she come up next year?

1*st Child.* No, not so soon;
But some day God will call her to come up,
And then she will. Papa knows everything —
He said she would before he planted her.

2*d Child.* It was at night she went to heaven. Last night
We saw a star before we went to bed.

1*st Child.* Yes, Uncle, did you know? A large bright star,
And at her side she had some little ones —
Some young ones.

M. Young ones! no, my little maid,
Those stars are very old.

1*st Child.* What! all of them?

M. Yes!

1*st Child.* Older than our father?

M. Older, far.

2*d Child.* They must be tired of shining there so long.
Perhaps they wish they might come down.

J. Perhaps!
Dear children, talk of what you understand.

Come, I must lift the trailing creepers up
That last night's wind has loosened.

1st Child. May we help?

Aunt, may we help to nail them?

J. We shall see.

Go, find and bring the hammer, and some shreds.

[*Steps outside the window, lifts a branch, and sings.*]

Should I change my allegiance for rancor
If fortune changes her side?
Or should I, like a vessel at anchor,
Turn with the turn of the tide?
Lift, O lift thou lowering sky,
An thou wilt thy gloom forego!
An thou wilt not, he and I
Need not part for drifts of snow.

M. [*within*] Lift! no, thou lowering sky, thou wilt not lift —

Thy motto readeth, "Never."

Children. Here they are!

Here are the nails! and may we help?

J. You shall

If I should want help.

1st Child. Will you want it, then?

Please want it — we like nailing.

2d Child. Yes, we do.

J. It seems I ought to want it: hold the bough,
And each may nail in turn.

[*Sings.*]

Like a daisy I was, near him growing:
Must I move because favors flag,

And be like a brown wall-flower blowing
Far out of reach in a crag?
Lift! O lift thou lowering sky,
An thou canst thy blue regain!
An thou canst not, he and I
Need not part for drops of rain.

1*st Child.* Now, have we nailed enough?

J. [*trains the creepers*] Yes; you may go;
But do not play too near the churchyard path.

M. [*within*] Even misfortune does not strike so near
As my dependence. O, in youth and strength
To sit a timid coward in the dark,
And feel before I set a cautious step!
It is so very dark, so far more dark
Than any night that day comes after — night
In which there would be stars, or else at least
The silvered portion of a sombre cloud
Through which the moon is plunging.

J. [*entering*] Merton!

M. Yes.

J. Dear Merton, did you know that I could hear?

M. No: e'en my solitude is not mine now,
And if I be alone is ofttimes doubt.
Alas! far more than eyesight have I lost;
For manly courage drifteth after it —
E'en as a splintered spar would drift away
From some dismasted wreck. Hear, I complain —
Like a weak ailing woman I complain.

J. For the first time.

M. I cannot bear the dark.

J. My brother! you do bear it — bear it well —
Have borne it twelve long months, and not complained.
Comfort your heart with music: all the air
Is warm with sunbeams where the organ stands.
You like to feel them on you. Come and play.

M. My fate, my fate is lonely!

J. So it is —
I know it is.

M. And pity breaks my heart.

J. Does it, dear Merton?

M. Yes, I say it does.
What! do you think I am so dull of ear
That I can mark no changes in the tones
That reach me? Once I liked not girlish pride
And that coy quiet, chary of reply,
That held me distant: now the sweetest lips
Open to entertain me — fairest hands
Are proffer'd me to guide. —

J. That is not well?

M. No: give me coldness, pride, or still disdain,
Gentle withdrawal. Give me anything
But this — a fearless, sweet, confiding ease,
Whereof I may expect, I may exact,
Considerate care, and have it — gentle speech,
And have it. Give me anything but this!
For they who give it, give it in the faith
That I will not misdeem them, and forget
My doom so far as to perceive thereby

Hope of a wife. They make this thought too plain;
They wound me — O they cut me to the heart!
When have I said to any one of them,
"I am a blind and desolate man; — come here,
I pray you — be as eyes to me?" When said,
Even to her whose pitying voice is sweet
To my dark ruined heart, as must be hands
That clasp a lifelong captive's through the grate,
And who will ever lend her delicate aid
To guide me, dark encumbrance that I am! —
When have I said to her, "Comforting voice,
Belonging to a face unknown, I pray
Be my wife's voice?"

J. Never, my brother, — no,
You never have!

M. What could she think of me
If I forgot myself so far? or what
Could she reply?

J. You do not ask like one
Who cares for my opinion, else perhaps,
Although I am not sure — although, perhaps,
I have no right to give it — I should say
She would reply, "I will!"

Afterthought.

Man dwells apart, though not alone,
He walks among his peers unread;

The best of thoughts which he hath known,
For lack of listeners are not said.

Yet dreaming on earth's clustered isles,
He saith "They dwell not lone like men,
Forgetful that their sunfleck'd smiles
Flash far beyond each other's ken."

He looks on God's eternal suns
That sprinkle the celestial blue,
And saith, "Ah! happy shining ones,
I would that men were grouped like you!"

Yet this is sure, the loveliest star
That cluster'd with its peers we see;
Only because from us so far
Doth near its fellows seem to be.

SONGS OF SEVEN.

SEVEN TIMES ONE. EXULTATION.

THERE'S no dew left on the daisies and clover,
There's no rain left in heaven:
I've said my "seven times" over and over,
Seven times one are seven.

I am old, so old, I can write a letter;
My birthday lessons are done;
The lambs play always, they know no better;
They are only one times one.

O moon! in the night I have seen you sailing
And shining so round and low;
You were bright! ah bright! but your light is failing —
You are nothing now but a bow.

You moon, have you done something wrong in heaven
That God has hidden your face?
I hope if you have you will soon be forgiven,
And shine again in your place.

O velvet bee, you're a dusty fellow,
You've powdered your legs with gold!
O brave marsh-mary buds, rich and yellow,
Give me your money to hold!

O columbine, open your folded wrapper,
Where two twin turtle-doves dwell!
O cuckoo-pint, toll me the purple clapper
That hangs in your clear green bell!

And show me your nest with the young ones in it;
I will not steal them away;
I am old! you may trust me, linnet, linnet —
I am seven times one to-day.

SEVEN TIMES TWO. ROMANCE.

You bells in the steeple, ring, ring out your changes,
How many soever they be,
And let the brown meadow-lark's note as he ranges
Come over, come over to me.

Yet birds' clearest carol by fall or by swelling
No magical sense conveys,
And bells have forgotten their old art of telling
The fortune of future days.

"Turn again, turn again," once they rang cheerily,
While a boy listened alone;
Made his heart yearn again, musing so wearily
All by himself on a stone.

Poor bells! I forgive you; your good days are over,
And mine, they are yet to be;
No listening, no longing shall ought, ought discover:
You leave the story to me.

The foxglove shoots out of the green matted heather,
And hangeth her hoods of snow;
She was idle, and slept till the sunshiny weather:
O children take long to grow.

I wish, and I wish that the spring would go faster,
Nor long summer bide so late;
And I could grow on like the foxglove and aster,
For some things are ill to wait.

I wait for the day when dear hearts shall discover,
While dear hands are laid on my head;
"The child is a woman, the book may close over,
For all the lessons are said."

I wait for my story — the birds cannot sing it,
Not one, as he sits on the tree;
The bells cannot ring it, but long years, O bring it!
Such as I wish it to be.

SEVEN TIMES THREE. LOVE.

I LEANED out of window, I smelt the white clover,
Dark, dark was the garden, I saw not the gate;
"Now, if there be footsteps, he comes, my one lover —
Hush, nightingale, hush! O, sweet nightingale, wait
Till I listen and hear
If a step draweth near,
For my love he is late!

"The skies in the darkness stoop nearer and nearer,
A cluster of stars hangs like fruit in the tree,
The fall of the water comes sweeter, comes clearer:
To what art thou listening, and what dost thou see?
Let the star-clusters glow,
Let the sweet waters flow,
And cross quickly to me.

"You night-moths that hover where honey brims over
From sycamore blossoms, or settle or sleep;
You glowworms shine out, and the pathway discover
To him that comes darkling along the rough steep.
Ah, my sailor, make haste,
For the time runs to waste,
And my love lieth deep —

"Too deep for swift telling: and yet my one lover
I've conned thee an answer it waits thee to-night."

By the sycamore passed he, and through the white clover,
Then all the sweet speech I had fashioned took flight;
But I'll love him more, more
Than e'er wife loved before,
Be the days dark or bright.

SEVEN TIMES FOUR. MATERNITY.

HEIGH HO! daisies and buttercups,
Fair yellow daffodils, stately and tall,
When the wind wakes how they rock in the grasses,
And dance with the cuckoo-buds, slender and small:
Here's two bonny boys, and here's mother's own lasses,
Eager to gather them all.

Heigh ho! daisies and buttercups:
Mother shall thread them a daisy chain;
Sing them a song of the pretty hedge-sparrow,
That loved her brown little ones, loved them full fain;
Sing, "Heart thou art wide though the house be but narrow"—
Sing once, and sing it again.

Heigh ho! daisies and buttercups,
Sweet wagging cowslips, they bend and they bow;

A ship sails afar over warm ocean waters,
And haply one musing doth stand at her prow.
O bonny brown sons, and O sweet little daughters,
Maybe he thinks on you now!

Heigh ho! daisies and buttercups,
Fair yellow daffodils, stately and tall;
A sunshiny world full of laughter and leisure,
And fresh hearts unconscious of sorrow and thrall,
Send down on their pleasure smiles passing its measure —
God that is over us all.

SEVEN TIMES FIVE. WIDOWHOOD.

I SLEEP and rest, my heart makes moan
Before I am well awake;
"Let me bleed! O let me alone,
Since I must not break!"

For children wake, though fathers sleep,
With a stone at foot and at head:
O sleepless God, forever keep,
Keep both living and dead!

I lift mine eyes, and what to see
But a world happy and fair;

I have not wished it to mourn with me —
Comfort is not there.

O what anear but golden brooms,
And a waste of reedy rills;
O what afar but the fine glooms
On the rare blue hills!

I shall not die, but live forlore —
How bitter it is to part!
O to meet thee, my love, once more! —
O my heart, my heart!

No more to hear, no more to see!
O that an echo might wake
And waft one note of thy psalm to me
Ere my heart-strings break!

I should know it how faint soe'er,
And with angel voices blent;
O once to feel thy spirit anear,
I could be content!

Or once between the gates of gold,
While an angel entering trod,
But once — thee sitting to behold
On the hills of God.

SEVEN TIMES SIX. GIVING IN MARRIAGE.

To bear, to nurse, to rear,
To watch, and then to lose:
To see my bright ones disappear,
Drawn up like morning dews —
To bear, to nurse, to rear,
To watch, and then to lose:
This have I done when God drew near
Among his own to choose.

To hear, to heed, to wed,
And with thy lord depart
In tears that he, as soon as shed,
Will let no longer smart. —
To hear, to heed, to wed,
This while thou didst I smiled,
For now it was not God who said,
"Mother, give ME thy child."

O fond, O fool, and blind,
To God I gave with tears,
But when a man like grace would find
My soul put by her fears —
O fond, O fool, and blind,
God guards in happier spheres;
That man will guard where he did bind
Is hope for unknown years.

To hear, to heed, to wed,
Fair lot that maidens choose,
Thy mother's tenderest words are said,
Thy face no more she views;
Thy mother's lot, my dear,
She doth in nought accuse;
Her lot to bear, to nurse, to rear,
To love — and then to lose.

SEVEN TIMES SEVEN. LONGING FOR HOME.

I.

A SONG of a boat: —
There was once a boat on a billow:
Lightly she rocked to her port remote,
And the foam was white in her wake like snow,
And her frail mast bowed when the breeze would blow,
And bent like a wand of willow.

II.

I shaded mine eyes one day when a boat
Went courtesying over the billow,
I marked her course till a dancing mote
She faded out on the moonlit foam,
And I stayed behind in the dear loved home;
And my thoughts all day were about the boat,
And my dreams upon the pillow.

III.

I pray you hear my song of a boat,
For it is but short: —
My boat, you shall find none fairer afloat,
In river or port.
Long I looked out for the lad she bore,
On the open desolate sea,
And I think he sailed to the heavenly shore,
For he came not back to me —
Ah me!

IV.

A song of a nest: —
There was once a nest in a hollow,
Down in the mosses and knot-grass pressed,
Soft and warm, and full to the brim;
Vetches leaned over it purple and dim,
With buttercup buds to follow

V.

I pray you hear my song of a nest
For it is not long: —
You shall never light in a summer quest
The bushes among —
Shall never light on a prouder sitter,
A fairer nestful, nor ever know
A softer sound than their tender twitter
That wind-like did come and go.

VI.

I had a nestful once of my own,
Ah happy, happy I
Right dearly I loved them: but when they were grown
They spread out their wings to fly —
O, one after one they flew away
Far up to the heavenly blue,
To the better country, the upper day,
And — I wish I was going too.

VII.

I pray you, what is the nest to me,
My empty nest?
And what is the shore where I stood to see
My boat sail down to the west?
Can I call that home where I anchor yet,
Though my good man has sailed?
Can I call that home where my nest was set,
Now all its hope hath failed?
Nay, but the port where my sailor went,
And the land where my nestlings be:
There is the home where my thoughts are sent,
The only home for me —
Ah me!

A COTTAGE IN A CHINE.

WE reached the place by night,
And heard the waves breaking:
They came to meet us with candles alight
To show the path we were taking.
A myrtle, trained on the gate, was white
With tufted flowers down shaking.

With head beneath her wing,
A little wren was sleeping—
So near, I had found it an easy thing
To steal her for my keeping
From the myrtle-bough that, with easy swing,
Across the path was sweeping.

Down rocky steps rough-hewed,
Where cup-mosses flowered,
And under the trees, all twisted and rude,
Wherewith the dell was dowered,
They led us, where deep in its solitude
Lay the cottage, leaf-embowered.

The thatch was all bespread
With climbing passion-flowers;

They were wet, and glisten'd with raindrops, shed
That day in genial showers.
"Was never a sweeter nest," we said,
"Than this little nest of ours."

We laid us down to sleep:
But as for me — waking,
I marked the plunge of the muffled deep
On its sandy reaches breaking;
For heart-joyance doth sometimes keep
From slumber, like heart-aching.

And I was glad that night,
With no reason ready,
To give my own heart for its deep delight,
That flowed like some tidal eddy,
Or shone like a star that was rising bright
With comforting radiance steady.

But on a sudden — hark!
Music struck asunder
Those meshes of bliss, and I wept in the dark,
So sweet was the unseen wonder;
So swiftly it touched, as if struck at a mark,
The trouble that joy kept under.

I rose — the moon outshone:
I saw the sea heaving,
And a little vessel sailing alone,

The small crisp wavelet cleaving;
'Twas she as she sailed to her port unknown —
Was that track of sweetness leaving.

We know they music made
In heaven, ere man's creation;
But when God threw it down to us that strayed,
It dropt with lamentation;
And ever since doth its sweetness shade
With sighs for its first station.

Its joy suggests regret —
Its most for more is yearning;
And it brings to the soul that its voice hath met,
No rest that cadence learning,
But a conscious part in the sighs that fret
Its nature for returning.

O Eve, sweet Eve! methought
When sometimes comfort winning,
As she watched the first children's tender sport,
Sole joy born since her sinning,
If a bird anear them sang, it brought
The pang as at beginning.

While swam the unshed tear,
Her prattlers little heeding,
Would murmur, "This bird, with its carol clear,
When the red clay was kneaden,

And God made Adam our father dear,
Sang to him thus in Eden."

The moon went in — the sky
And earth and sea hiding,
I laid me down, with the yearning sigh
Of that strain in my heart abiding;
I slept, and the bark that had sailed so nigh,
In my dream was ever gliding.

I slept, but waked amazed,
With sudden noise frighted,
And voices without, and a flash that dazed
My eyes from candles lighted.
"Ah! surely," methought, "by these shouts upraised
Some travellers are benighted."

A voice was at my side —
"Waken, madam, waken!
The long prayed-for ship at her anchor doth ride,
Let the child from its rest be taken;
For the captain doth weary for babe and for bride —
Waken, madam, waken!

"The home you left but late,
He speeds to it light-hearted;
By the wires he sent this news, and straight
To you with it they started."
O joy for a yearning heart too great,
O union for the parted!

We rose up in the night,
The morning star was shining;
We carried the child in its slumber light
Out by the myrtles twining:
Orion over the sea hung bright,
And glorious in declining.

Mother, to meet her son,
Smiled first, then wept the rather;
And wife, to bind up those links undone,
And cherished words to gather,
And to show the face of her little one,
That had never seen its father.

That cottage in a chine
We were not to behold it,
But there may the purest of sunbeams shine,
May freshest flowers enfold it,
For sake of the news which our hearts must twine
With the bower where we were told it!

Now oft, left lone again,
Sit mother and sit daughter,
And bless the good ship that sailed over the main,
And the favoring winds that brought her;
While still some new beauty they fable and feign
For the cottage by the water.

PERSEPHONE.

(Written for The Portfolio Society, January, 1862
Subject given — "Light and Shade.")

SHE stepped upon Sicilian grass,
Demeter's daughter fresh and fair,
A child of light, a radiant lass,
And gamesome as the morning air.
The daffodils were fair to see,
They nodded lightly on the lea,
Persephone — Persephone!

Lo! one she marked of rarer growth
Than orchis or anemone;
For it the maiden left them both,
And parted from her company.
Drawn nigh she deemed it fairer still,
And stooped to gather by the rill
The daffodil, the daffodil.

What ailed the meadow that it shook
What ailed the air of Sicily?
She wondered by the brattling brook,

And trembled with the trembling lea.
"The coal-black horses rise — they rise:
O mother, mother!" low she cries —
Persephone — Persephone!

"O light, light, light!" she cries, "farewell;
The coal-black horses wait for me.
O shade of shades, where I must dwell,
Demeter, mother, far from thee!
Ah, fated doom that I fulfil!
Ah, fateful flower beside the rill!
The daffodil, the daffodil!"

What ails her that she comes not home?
Demeter seeks her far and wide,
And gloomy-browed doth ceaseless roam
From many a morn till eventide.
"My life, immortal though it be,
Is nought," she cries, "for want of thee,
Persephone, Persephone!

"Meadows of Enna, let the rain
No longer drop to feed your rills,
Nor dew refresh the fields again,
With all their nodding daffodils!
Fade, fade and droop, O lilied lea,
Where thou, dear heart, wert reft from me —
Persephone, Persephone!"

She reigns upon her dusky throne,
Mid shades of heroes dread to see;
Among the dead she breathes alone,
Persephone, Persephone.
Or seated on the elysian hill
She dreams of earthly daylight still,
And murmurs of the daffodil.

A voice in Hades soundeth clear,
The shadows mourn and flit below;
It cries — "Thou Lord of Hades, hear,
And let Demeter's daughter go.
The tender corn upon the lea
Droops in her goddess gloom when she
Cries for her lost Persephone.

"From land to land she raging flies,
The green fruit falleth in her wake,
And harvest fields beneath her eyes
To earth the grain unripened shake.
Arise, and set the maiden free;
Why should the world such sorrow dree
By reason of Persephone?"

He takes the cleft pomegranate seeds:
"Love, eat with me this parting day;"
Then bids them fetch the coal-black steeds —
"Demeter's daughter, wouldst away?"
The gates of Hades set her free;

"She will return full soon," saith he —
"My wife, my wife Persephone."

Low laughs the dark king on his throne —
"I gave her of pomegranate seeds;"
Demeter's daughter stands alone
Upon the fair Eleusian meads.
Her mother meets her. "Hail!" saith she;
"And doth our daylight dazzle thee,
My love, my child Persephone?

"What moved thee, daughter, to forsake
Thy fellow-maids that fatal morn,
And give thy dark lord power to take
Thee living to his realm forlorn?"
Her lips reply without her will,
As one addressed who slumbereth still —
"The daffodil, the daffodil!"

Her eyelids droop with light oppressed,
And sunny wafts that round her stir,
Her cheek upon her mother's breast —
Demeter's kisses comfort her.
Calm Queen of Hades, art thou she
Who stepped so lightly on the lea —
Persephone, Persephone?

When in her destined course, the moon
Meets the deep shadow of this world,

And laboring on doth seem to swoon
  Through awful wastes of dimness whirled —
Emerged at length, no trace hath she
Of that dark hour of destiny,
Still silvery sweet — Persephone.

The greater world may near the less,
  And draw it through her weltering shade,
But not one biding trace impress
  Of all the darkness that she made;
The greater soul that draweth thee
Hath left his shadow plain to see
On thy fair face, Persephone!

Demeter sighs, but sure 'tis well
  The wife should love her destiny;
They part, and yet, as legends tell,
  She mourns her lost Persephone;
While chant the maids of Enna still —
"O fateful flower beside the rill —
The daffodil, the daffodil!"

A SEA SONG.

LD ALBION sat on a crag of late,
And sung out — "Ahoy! ahoy!
Long life to the captain, good luck to the mate,
And this to my sailor boy.
Come over, come home,
Through the salt sea foam,
My sailor, my sailor boy.

"Here's a crown to be given away, I ween,
A crown for my sailor's head,
And all for the worth of a widowed queen,
And the love of the noble dead;
And the fear and fame
Of the island's name
Where my boy was born and bred.

"Content thee, content thee, let it alone,
Thou marked for a choice so rare;
Though treaties be treaties, never a throne
Was proffered for cause as fair.
Yet come to me home,
Through the salt sea foam,
For the Greek must ask elsewhere.

"'Tis pity, my sailor, but who can tell?
Many lands they look to me;
One of these might be wanting a Prince as well,
But that's as hereafter may be."
She raised her white head
And laughed; and she said
"That's as hereafter may be."

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON.

IT was a village built in a green rent,
Between two cliffs that skirt the dangerous bay

A reef of level rock runs out to sea,
And you may lie on it and look sheer down,
Just where the "Grace of Sunderland" was lost,
And see the elastic banners of the dulse
Rock softly, and the orange star-fish creep
Across the laver, and the mackerel shoot
Over and under it, like silver boats
Turning at will and plying under water.

There on that reef we lay upon our breasts,
My brother and I, and half the village lads,
For an old fisherman had called to us
With "Sirs, the syle be come." "And what are they?"
My brother said. "Good lack!" the old man cried,
And shook his head, "To think you gentlefolk
Should ask what syle be! Look you; I can't say
What syle be called in your fine dictionaries,
Nor what name God Almighty calls them by
When their food's ready and he sends them south;
But our folk call them syle, and nought but syle,
And when they're grown, why then we call them herring.

I tell you, Sir, the water is as full
Of them as pastures be of blades of grass;
You'll draw a score out in a landing net,
And none of them be longer than a pin.

"Syle! ay, indeed, we should be badly off,
I reckon, and so would God Almighty's gulls,"
He grumbled on in his quaint piety,
"And all His other birds, if He should say
I will not drive my syle into the south;
The fisher folk may do without my syle,
And do without the shoals of fish it draws
To follow and feed on it."
This said we made
Our peace with him by means of two small coins,
And down we ran and lay upon the reef,
And saw the swimming infants, emerald green,
In separate shoals, the scarcely turning ebb
Bringing them in; while sleek, and not intent
On chase, but taking that which came to hand,
The full-fed mackerel and the gurnet swam
Between; and settling on the polished sea,
A thousand snow-white gulls sat lovingly
In social rings, and twittered while they fed.
The village dogs and ours, elate and brave,
Lay looking over, barking at the fish;
Fast, fast the silver creatures took the bait,
And when they heaved and floundered on the rock,
In beauteous misery, a sudden pat

Some shaggy pup would deal, then back away,
At distance eye them with sagacious doubt,
And shrink half frighted from the slippery things.

And so we lay from ebb-tide, till the flow
Rose high enough to drive us from the reef;
The fisher lads went home across the sand;
We climbed the cliff and sat an hour or more,
Talking and looking down. It was not talk
Of much significance, except for this —
That we had more in common than of old,
For both were tired, I with overwork,
He with inaction; I was glad at heart
To rest, and he was glad to have an ear
That he could grumble to, and half in jest
Rail at entails, deplore the fate of heirs,
And the misfortune of a good estate —
Misfortune that was sure to pull him down,
Make him a dreamy, selfish, useless man:
Indeed he felt himself deteriorate
Already. Thereupon he sent down showers
Of clattering stones, to emphasize his words,
And leap the cliffs and tumble noisily
Into the seething wave. And as for me,
I railed at him and at ingratitude,
While rifling of the basket he had slung
Across his shoulders; then with right good will
We fell to work, and feasted like the gods,
Like laborers, or like eager workhouse folk

At Yuletide dinner; or, to say the whole
At once, like tired, hungry, healthy youth,
Until the meal being o'er, the tilted flask
Drained of its latest drop, the meat and bread
And ruddy cherries eaten, and the dogs
Mumbling the bones, this elder brother of mine,
This man, that never felt an ache or pain
In his broad, well-knit frame, and never knew
The trouble of an unforgiven grudge,
The sting of a regretted meanness, nor
The desperate struggle of the unendowed
For place and for possession — he began
To sing a rhyme that he himself had wrought;
Sending it out with cogitative pause,
As if the scene where he had shaped it first
Had rolled it back on him, and meeting it
Thus unaware, he was of doubtful mind
Whether his dignity it well beseemed
To sing of pretty maiden:

Goldilocks sat on the grass,
  Tying up of posies rare,
Hardly could a sunbeam pass
  Through the cloud that was her hair.
Purple orchis lasteth long,
  Primrose flowers are pale and clear;
O the maiden sang a song
  It would do you good to hear!

Sad before her leaned the boy,
  "Goldilocks that I love well,

Happy creature fair and coy,
  Think o' me, sweet Amabel."
Goldilocks she shook apart,
  Looked with doubtful, doubtful eyes,
Like a blossom in her heart,
  Opened out her first surprise.

As a gloriole sign o' grace,
  Goldilocks, ah fall and flow,
On the blooming, childlike face,
  Dimple, dimple, come and go.
Give her time; on grass and sky
  Let her gaze if she be fain,
As they looked ere he drew nigh,
  They will never look again.

Ah! the playtime she has known,
  While her goldilocks grew long,
Is it like a nestling flown,
  Childhood over like a song?
Yes, the boy may clear his brow,
  Though she thinks to say him nay,
When she sighs, "I cannot now,
  Come again some other day."

"Hold! there," he cried, half angry with himself,
"That ending goes amiss:" then turned again
To the old argument that we had held,
"Now look you!" said my brother, "You may talk
Till, weary of the talk, I answer 'Ay,
There's reason in your words;' and you may talk
Till I go on to say, 'This should be so;'

And you may talk till I shall further own
'It *is* so; yes, I am a lucky dog!'
Yet not the less shall I next morning wake,
And with a natural and fervent sigh,
Such as you never heaved, I shall exclaim
'What an unlucky dog I am!'" And here
He broke into a laugh. "But as for you —
You! on all hands you have the best of me;
Men have not robbed *you* of your birthright — work,
Nor ravaged in old days a peaceful field,
Nor wedded heiresses against their will,
Nor sinned, nor slaved, nor stooped, nor overreached,
That you might drone a useless life away,
Mid half a score of bleak and barren farms
And half a dozen bogs."

"O rare!" I cried,
"His wrongs go nigh to make him eloquent;
Now we behold how far bad actions reach!
Because five hundred years ago a Knight
Drove geese and beeves out from a Franklin's yard;
Because three hundred years ago a 'squire —
Against her will, and for her fair estate —
Married a very ugly red-haired maid,
The blest inheritor of all their pelf,
While in the full enjoyment of the same
Sighs on his own confession every day.
He cracks no egg without a moral sigh,
Nor eats of beef, but thinking on that wrong;
Then, yet the more to be revenged on them,

And shame their ancient pride, if they should know,
Works hard as any horse for his degree,
And takes to writing verses."
"Ay," he said,
Half laughing at himself, "Yet you and I,
But for those tresses which enrich us yet
With somewhat of the hue that partial fame
Calls auburn when it shines on heads of heirs,
But when it flames round brows of younger sons,
Just red — mere red; why, but for this, I say,
And but for selfish getting of the land,
And beggarly entailing it, we two,
To-day well fed, well grown, well dressed, well read,
We might have been two horny-handed boors —
Lean, clumsy, ignorant, and ragged boors —
Planning for moonlight nights a poaching scheme,
Or soiling our dull souls and consciences
With plans for pilfering a cottage roost.

"What, chorus! are you dumb? you should have cried,
'So good comes out of evil;'" and with that,
As if all pauses it was natural
To seize for songs, his voice broke out again:

Coo, dove, to thy married mate,
She has two warm eggs in her nest,
Tell her the hours are few to wait
Ere life shall dawn on their rest;
And thy young shall peck at the shells, elate
With a dream of her brooding breast.

Coo, dove, for she counts the hours,
Her fair wings ache for flight:
By day the apple has grown in the flowers,
And the moon has grown by night;
And the white drift settled from hawthorn bowers,
Yet they will not seek the light.

Coo, dove; but what of the sky!
And what if the storm-wind swell,
And the reeling branch come down from on high
To the grass where daisies dwell,
And the brood belovèd should with them lie,
Or ever they break the shell?

Coo, dove; and yet black clouds lower,
Like fate, on the far-off sea,
Thunder and wind they bear to thy bower,
As on wings of destiny.
Ah, what if they break in an evil hour,
As they broke over mine and me!

What next? — we started like to girls, for lo!
The creaking voice, more harsh than rusty crane,
Of one who stooped behind us, cried aloud
"Good lack! how sweet the gentleman does sing —
So loud and sweet, 'tis like to split his throat.
Why Mike's a child to him, a two years' child —
A Chrisom child."
"Who's Mike?" my brother growled
A little roughly. Quoth the fisherman —
"Mike, Sir? he's just a fisher lad, no more;
But he can sing, when he takes on to sing,

So loud there's not a sparrow in the spire
But needs must hear. Sir, if I might make bold,
I'd ask what song that was you sung. My mate,
As we were shoving off the mackerel boats,
Said he, "I'll wager that's the sort o' song,
They kept their hearts up with in the Crimea.'"

"There, fisherman," quoth I, "he showed his wit,
Your mate; he marked the sound of savage war —
Gunpowder, groans, hot-shot, and bursting shells,
And 'murderous messages,' delivered by
Spent balls that break the heads of dreaming men."

"Ay ay, Sir!" quoth the fisherman. "Have done,"
My brother. And I — "The gift belongs to few
Of sending farther than the words can reach
Their spirit and expression;" still — "Have done!"
He cried; and then "I rolled the rubbish out
More loudly than the meaning warranted,
To air my lungs — I thought not on the words."

Then said the fisherman, who missed the point,
"So Mike rolls out the psalm; you'll hear him, Sir,
Please God you live till Sunday."
"Even so:
And you, too, fisherman; for here, they say,
You are all church-goers."
"Surely, Sir," quoth he,
Took off his hat and stroked his old white head

And wrinkled face; then sitting by us said,
As one that utters with a quiet mind
Unchallenged truth — "'Tis lucky for the boats."

The boats! 'tis lucky for the boats! Our eyes
Were drawn to him as either fain would say,
What! do they send the psalm up in the spire,
And pray because 'tis lucky for the boats?

But he, the brown old man, the wrinkled man,
That all his life had been a church-goer,
Familiar with celestial cadences,
Informed of all he could receive, and sure
Of all he understood — he sat content,
And we kept silence. In his reverend face
There was a simpleness we could not sound;
Much truth had passed him overhead; some error
He had trod under foot; — God comfort him!
He could not learn of us, for we were young
And he was old, and so we gave it up;
And the sun went into the west, and down
Upon the water stooped an orange cloud,
And the pale milky reaches flushed, as glad
To wear its colors; and the sultry air
Went out to sea, and puffed the sails of ships
With thymy wafts, the breath of trodden grass:
It took moreover music, for across
The heather belt, and over pasture land
Came the sweet monotone of one slow bell,

And parted time into divisions rare,
Whereof each morsel brought its own delight.

"They ring for service," quoth the fisherman;
"Our parson preaches in the church to-night."

"And do the people go?" my brother asked.

"Ay, Sir; they count it mean to stay away,
He takes it so to heart. He's a rare man,
Our parson; half a head above us all"

"That's a great gift, and notable," said I.

"Ay, Sir; and when he was a younger man
He went out in the lifeboat very oft,
Before the 'Grace of Sunderland' was wrecked.
He's never been his own man since that hour;
For there were thirty men aboard of her,
Anigh as close as you are now to me,
And ne'er a one was saved.
They're lying now,
With two small children, in a row: the church
And yard are full of seamen's graves, and few
Have any names.
She bumped upon the reef;
Our parson, my young son, and several more
Were lashed together with a two-inch rope,
And crept along to her; their mates ashore

Ready to haul them in. The gale was high,
The sea was all a boiling seething froth,
And God Almighty's guns were going off,
And the land trembled.

"When she took the ground,
She went to pieces like a lock of hay
Tossed from a pitchfork. Ere it came to that,
The captain reeled on deck with two small things,
One in each arm — his little lad and lass.
Their hair was long and blew before his face,
Or else we thought he had been saved; he fell,
But held them fast. The crew, poor luckless souls!
The breakers licked them off; and some were crushed,
Some swallowed in the yeast, some flung up dead,
The dear breath beaten out of them: not one
Jumped from the wreck upon the reef to catch
The hands that strained to reach, but tumbled back
With eyes wide open. But the captain lay
And clung — the only man alive. They prayed —
For God's sake, captain, throw the children here!
'Throw them!' our parson cried; and then she struck:
And he threw one, a pretty two years' child,
But the gale dashed him on the slippery verge,
And down he went. They say they heard him cry.

"Then he rose up and took the other one,
And all our men reached out their hungry arms,
And cried out, 'Throw her, throw her!' and he did

He threw her right against the parson's breast,
And all at once a sea broke over them,
And they that saw it from the shore have said
It struck the wreck, and piecemeal scattered it,
Just as a woman might the lump of salt
That 'twixt her hands into the kneading pan
She breaks and crumbles on her rising bread.

"We hauled our men in: two of them were dead —
The sea had beaten them, their heads hung down;
Our parson's arms were empty, for the wave
Had torn away the pretty, pretty lamb;
We often see him stand beside her grave:
But 'twas no fault of his, no fault of his.

"I ask your pardon, Sirs, I prate and prate,
And never have I said what brought me here
Sirs, if you want a boat to-morrow morn,
I'm bold to say there's ne'er a boat like mine."

"Ay, that was what we wanted," we replied;
"A boat, his boat;" and off he went, well pleased.

We, too, rose up (the crimson in the sky
Flushing our faces), and went sauntering on,
And thought to reach our lodging, by the cliff.
And up and down among the heather beds,
And up and down between the sheaves we sped,
Doubling and winding; for a long ravine

Ran up into the land and cut us off,
Pushing out slippery ledges for the birds,
And rent with many a crevice, where the wind
Had laid up drifts of empty eggshells, swept
From the bare berths of gulls and guillemots.

So as it chanced we lighted on a path
That led into a nutwood; and our talk
Was louder than beseemed, if we had known,
With argument and laughter; for the path,
As we sped onward, took a sudden turn
Abrupt, and we came out on churchyard grass,
And close upon a porch, and face to face
With those within, and with the thirty graves.
We heard the voice of one who preached within,
And stopped. "Come on," my brother whispered me,
"It were more decent that we enter now;
Come on! we'll hear this rare old demigod:
I like strong men and large; I like gray heads,
And grand gruff voices, hoarse though this may be
With shouting in the storm."
It was not hoarse,
The voice that preached to those few fishermen,
And women, nursing mothers with the babes
Hushed on their breasts; and yet it held them not:
Their drowsy eyes were drawn to look at us,
Till, having leaned our rods against the wall,
And left the dogs at watch, we entered, sat,
And were apprised that, though he saw us not,

The parson knew that he had lost the eyes
And ears of those before him, for he made
A pause — a long dead pause, and dropped his arms,
And stood awaiting, till I felt the red
Mount to my brow.
And a soft fluttering stir
Passed over all, and every mother hushed
The babe beneath her shawl, and he turned round
And met our eyes, unused to diffidence,
But diffident of his ; then with a sigh
Fronted the folk, lifted his grand gray head,
And said, as one that pondered now the words,
He had been preaching on with new surprise
And found fresh marvel in their sound, " Behold !
Behold ! " saith he, " I stand at the door and knock."

Then said the parson : " What ! and shall He wait,
And must He wait, not only till we say,
' Good Lord, the house is clean, the hearth is swept,
The children sleep, the mackerel-boats are in,
And all the nets are mended ; therefore I
Will slowly to the door and open it,'
But must He also wait where still, behold !
He stands and knocks, while we do say, ' Good Lord,
The gentlefolk are come to worship here,
And I will up and open to Thee soon ;
But first I pray a little longer wait,
For I am taken up with them ; my eyes
Must needs regard the fashion of their clothes,

And count the gains I think to make by them;
Forsooth they are of much account, good Lord!
Therefore have patience with me — wait, dear Lord!
Or come again?'

What! must He wait for THIS —
For this? Ay, He doth wait for this, and still,
Waiting for this, He, patient, raileth not;
Waiting for this, e'en this He saith, 'Behold!
I stand at the door and knock.'

O, patient hand!
Knocking and waiting — knocking in the night
When work is done — I charge you, by the sea,
Whereby you fill your children's mouths, and by
The might of Him that made it — fishermen!
I charge you, mothers! by the mother's milk
He drew, and by His Father, God over all,
Blessèd forever, that ye answer Him,
Open the door with shame, if ye have sinned;
If ye be sorry, open it with sighs.
Albeit the place be bare for poverty,
And comfortless for lack of plenishing,
Be not abashed for that, but open it,
And take Him in that comes to sup with thee;
'Behold!' He saith, 'I stand at the door and knock.'

"Now, hear me: there be troubles in this world
That no man can escape, and there is one
That lieth hard and heavy on my soul,
Concerning that which is to come —

I say
As a man that knows what earthly trouble means,
I will not bear this ONE — I cannot bear
This ONE — I cannot bear the weight of you —
You — every one of you, body and soul;
You, with the care you suffer, and the loss
That you sustain; you, with the growing up
To peril, may be with the growing old
To want, unless before I stand with you
At the great white throne, I may be free of all,
And utter to the full what shall discharge
Mine obligation: nay, I will not wait
A day, for every time the black clouds rise,
And the gale freshens, still I search my soul
To find if there be aught that can persuade
To good, or aught forsooth that can beguile
From evil, that I (miserable man!
If that be so) have left unsaid, undone.

"So that when any risen from sunken wrecks,
Or rolled in by the billows to the edge
Of the everlasting strand, what time the sea
Gives up her dead, shall meet me, they may say
Never, 'Old man, you told us not of this;
You left us fisher lads, that had to toil
Ever in danger of the secret stab
Of rocks, far deadlier than the dagger; winds,
Of breath more murderous than the cannon's; waves,
Mighty to rock us to our death; and gulfs,

Ready beneath to suck and swallow us in:
This crime be on your head; and as for us —
What shall we do?' but rather — nay, not so,
I will not think it; I will leave the dead,
Appealing but to life: I am afraid
Of you, but not so much if you have sinned
As for the doubt if sin shall be forgiven.
The day was, I have been afraid of pride —
Hard man's hard pride; but now I am afraid
Of man's humility. I counsel you,
By the great God's great humbleness, and by
His pity, be not humble over-much.
See! I will show at whose unopened doors
He stands and knocks, that you may never say,
'I am too mean, too ignorant, too lost;
He knocks at other doors, but not at mine.'

"See here! it is the night! it is the night!
And snow lies thickly, white untrodden snow,
And the wan moon upon a casement shines —
A casement crusted o'er with frosty leaves,
That make her ray less bright along the floor.
A woman sits with hands upon her knees,
Poor tired soul! and she has nought to do,
For there is neither fire nor candle-light:
The driftwood ash lies cold upon her hearth;
The rushlight flickered down an hour ago;
Her children wail a little in their sleep
For cold and hunger; and, as if that sound

Was not enough, another comes to her,
Over God's undefilèd snow — a song —
Nay, never hang your heads — I say, a song.

"And doth she curse the alehouse, and the sots
That drink the night out, and their earnings there,
And drink their manly strength and courage down,
And drink away the little children's bread,
And starve her, starving by the self-same act
Her tender suckling, that with piteous eyes
Looks in her face, till scarcely she has heart
To work, and earn the scanty bit and drop
That feed the others?
Does she curse the song?
I think not, fishermen; I have not heard
Such women curse. God's curse is curse enough.
To-morrow she will say a bitter thing,
Pulling her sleeve down lest the bruises show —
A bitter thing, but meant for an excuse —
'My master is not worse than many men:'
But now, ay, now she sitteth dumb and still;
No food, no comfort, cold and poverty
Bearing her down.
My heart is sore for her;
How long, how long? When troubles come of God,
When men are frozen out of work, when wives
Are sick, when working fathers fail and die,
When boats go down at sea — then nought behooves
Like patience; but for troubles wrought of men
Patience is hard — I tell you it is hard.

"O thou poor soul! it is the night — the night
Against thy door drifts up the silent snow,
Blocking thy threshold: 'Fall,' thou sayest, 'fall, fall,
Cold snow, and lie and be trod underfoot.
Am not I fallen? wake up and pipe, O wind,
Dull wind, and beat and bluster at my door:
Merciful wind, sing me a hoarse rough song,
For there is other music made to-night
That I would fain not hear. Wake, thou still sea,
Heavily plunge. Shoot on, white waterfall.
O, I could long like thy cold icicles
Freeze, freeze, and hang upon the frosty clift
And not complain, so I might melt at last
In the warm summer sun, as thou wilt do!

"'But woe is me! I think there is no sun;
My sun is sunken, and the night grows dark:
None care for me. The children cry for bread,
And I have none; and nought can comfort me.
Even if the heavens were free to such as I,
It were not much, for death is long to wait,
And heaven is far to go!'

"And speakest thou thus
Despairing of the sun that sets to thee,
And of the earthly love that wanes to thee,
And of the heaven that lieth far from thee?
Peace, peace, fond fool! One draweth near thy door
Whose footsteps leave no print across the snow;
Thy sun has risen with comfort in his face,

The smile of heaven, to warm thy frozen heart,
And bless with saintly hand. What! is it long
To wait, and far to go? Thou shalt not go;
Behold, across the snow to thee He comes,
Thy heaven descends, and is it long to wait?
Thou shalt not wait: 'this night, this night,' He saith,
'I stand at the door and knock.'

"It is enough — can such an one be here —
Yea, here? O God forgive you, fishermen!
One! is there only one? But do thou know,
O woman! pale for want if thou art here,
That on thy lot much thought is spent in heaven;
And, coveting the heart a hard man broke,
One standeth patient, watching in the night,
And waiting in the daytime?
What shall be
If thou wilt answer? He will smile on thee;
One smile of His shall be enough to heal
The wound of man's neglect; and He will sigh,
Pitying the trouble which that sigh shall cure;
And He will speak — speak in the desolate night,
In the dark night: 'For me a thorny crown
Men wove, and nails were driven in my hands
And feet: there was an earthquake, and I died;
I died, and am alive for evermore.

"'I died for thee; for thee I am alive,
And my humanity doth mourn for thee,
For thou art mine; and all thy little ones,

They, too, are mine, are mine. Behold, the house
Is dark, but there is brightness where the sons
Of God are singing, and, behold, the heart
Is troubled: yet the nations walk in white;
They have forgotten how to weep; and thou
Shalt also come, and I will foster thee
And satisfy thy soul; and thou shalt warm
Thy trembling life beneath the smile of God.
A little while — it is a little while —
A little while, and I will comfort thee;
I go away, but I will come again.'

"But hear me yet. There was a poor old man
Who sat and listened to the raging sea,
And heard it thunder, lunging at the cliffs
As like to tear them down. He lay at night;
And 'Lord have mercy on the lads,' said he,
'That sailed at noon, though they be none of mine;
For when the gale gets up, and when the wind
Flings at the window, when it beats the roof,
And lulls and stops and rouses up again,
And cuts the crest clean off the plunging wave,
And scatters it like feathers up the field,
Why then I think of my two lads: my lads
That would have worked and never let me want,
And never let me take the parish pay.
No, none of mine; my lads were drowned at sea —
My two — before the most of these were born.
I know how sharp that cuts, since my poor wife

Walked up and down, and still walked up and down,
And I walked after, and one could not hear
A word the other said, for wind and sea
That raged and beat and thundered in the night —
The awfullest, the longest, lightest night
That ever parents had to spend. A moon
That shone like daylight on the breaking wave.
Ah, me! and other men have lost their lads,
And other women wiped their poor dead mouths,
And got them home and dried them in the house,
And seen the driftwood lie along the coast,
That was a tidy boat but one day back,
And seen next tide the neighbors gather it
To lay it on their fires.
Ay, I was strong
And able-bodied — loved my work; — but now
I am a useless hull: 'tis time I sunk;
I am in all men's way; I trouble them;
I am a trouble to myself: but yet
I feel for mariners of stormy nights,
And feel for wives that watch ashore. Ay, ay,
If I had learning I would pray the Lord
To bring them in: but I'm no scholar, no;
Book-learning is a world too hard for me:
But I make bold to say, 'O Lord, good Lord,
I am a broken-down poor man, a fool
To speak to Thee: but in the book 'tis writ,
As I hear say from others that can read,
How, when Thou camest, Thou didst love the sea,

And live with fisherfolk, whereby 'tis sure
Thou knowest all the peril they go through,
And all their trouble.
As for me, good Lord,
I have no boat; I am too old, too old —
My lads are drowned; I buried my poor wife;
My little lasses died so long ago
That mostly I forget what they were like.
Thou knowest, Lord, they were such little ones;
I know they went to Thee, but I forget
Their faces, though I missed them sore.
O Lord,
I was a strong man; I have drawn good food
And made good money out of Thy great sea:
But yet I cried for them at nights; and now,
Although I be so old, I miss my lads,
And there be many folk this stormy night
Heavy with fear for theirs. Merciful Lord,
Comfort them; save their honest boys, their pride,
And let them hear next ebb the blessedest,
Best sound — the boat-keels grating on the sand.

"'I cannot pray with finer words, I know
Nothing; I have no learning, cannot learn —
Too old, too old. They say I want for nought,
I have the parish pay; but I am dull
Of hearing, and the fire scarce warms me through.
God save me, I have been a sinful man,
And save the lives of them that still can work,

For they are good to me; ay, good to me.
But, Lord, I am a trouble! and I sit
And I am lonesome, and the nights are few
That any think to come and draw a chair,
And sit in my poor place and talk a while.
Why should they come, forsooth? Only the wind
Knocks at my door, O long and loud it knocks,
The only thing God made that has a mind
To enter in.'

Yea, thus the old man spake,
These were the last words of his aged mouth —
BUT ONE DID KNOCK. One came to sup with him,
That humble, weak, old man; knocked at his door
In the rough pauses of the laboring wind.
I tell you that One knocked while it was dark,
Save where their foaming passion had made white
Those livid seething billows. What He said
In that poor place where He did talk a while,
I cannot tell: but this I am assured,
That when the neighbors came the morrow morn,
What time the wind had bated, and the sun
Shone on the old man's floor, they saw the smile
He passed away in, and they said, 'He looks
As he had woke and seen the face of Christ,
And with that rapturous smile held out his arms
To come to Him!'

"Can such an one be here?
So old, so weak, so ignorant, so frail.

The Lord be good to thee, thou poor old man;
It would be hard with thee if heaven were shut
To such as have not learning. Nay, nay, nay,
He condescends to them of low estate;
To such as are despised He cometh down,
Stands at the door and knocks.

"Yet bear with me,
I have a message; I have more to say.
Shall sorrow win His pity, and not sin?
That burden ten times heavier to be borne:
What think you? Shall the virtuous have His care
Alone? O, virtuous women, think not scorn,
For you may lift your faces everywhere;
And now that it grows dusk, and I can see
None though they front me straight, I fain would tell
A certain thing to you. I say to *you* —
And if it doth concern you, as methinks
It doth, then surely it concerneth all —
I say that there was once — I say not here —
I say that there was once a castaway,
And she was weeping, weeping bitterly;
Kneeling, and crying with a heart-sick cry
That choked itself in sobs — 'Oh my good name,
Oh my good name.' And none did hear her cry!
Nay; and it lightened, and the storm-bolts fell,
And the rain splashed upon the roof, and still
She, storm-tost as the storming elements!
She cried with an exceeding bitter cry,

'Oh my good name.' And then the thunder-cloud
Stooped low and burst in darkness overhead,
And rolled and rocked her on her knees, and shook
The frail foundations of her dwelling-place.
But she — if any neighbor had come in
(None did) : if any neighbor had come in,
They might have seen her crying on her knees,
And sobbing 'Lost, lost, lost,' beating her breast —
Her breast forever pricked with cruel thorns,
The wounds whereof could neither balm assuage
Nor any patience heal — Beating her brow,
Which ached, it had been bent so long to hide
From level eyes, whose meaning was contempt.

"O ye good women, it is hard to leave
The paths of virtue, and return again.
What if this sinner wept, and none of you
Comforted her — and what if she did strive
To mend, and none of you believed her strife,
Nor looked upon her — mark, I do not say,
Though it was hard, you therefore were to blame
That she had aught against you, though your feet
Never drew near her door ; but I beseech
Your patience. Once in old Jerusalem
A woman kneeled at consecrated feet,
Kissed them, and washed them with her tears.
What then ?
I think that yet our Lord is pitiful :
I think I see the castaway e'en now !

And she is not alone: the heavy rain
Splashes without, and sullen thunder rolls,
But she is lying at the sacred feet
Of One transfigured.
And her tears flow down,
Down to her lips, — her lips that kiss the print
Of nails; and love is like to break her heart!
Love and repentance — for it still doth work
Sore in her soul to think, to think that she,
Even she, did pierce the sacred, sacred feet,
And bruise the thorn-crowned head.
O Lord, our Lord,
How great is Thy compassion. Come, good Lord,
For we will open. Come this night, good Lord;
Stand at the door and knock.
And is this all:
Trouble, old age and simpleness, and sin?
This all: it might be all some other night.
But this night, if a voice said 'Give account
Whom hast thou with thee?' then must I reply,
'Young manhood have I, beautiful youth and strength,
Rich with all treasure drawn up from the crypt,
Where lies the learning of the ancient world —
Brave with all thoughts that poets fling upon
The strand of life — as driftweed after storms:
Doubtless familiar with thy mountain-heads,
And the dread purity of Alpine snows,
Doubtless familiar with thy works concealed
For ages from mankind — outlying worlds,

And many moonèd spheres — and thy great store
Of stars, more thick than mealy dust which here
Powders the pale leaves of Auriculas.

"'This do I know, but, Lord, I know not more.

"'Not more concerning them — concerning Thee,
I know Thy bounty; where Thou givest much
Standing without, if any call Thee in
Thou givest more' — speak, then, O rich and strong;
Open, O happy young, ere yet the hand
Of Him that knocks, wearied at last, forbear;
The patient foot, its thankless quest, refrain,
The wounded heart for evermore withdraw."

I have heard many speak, but this one man —
So anxious not to go to heaven alone —
This one man I remember, and his look,
Till twilight overshadowed him. He ceased,
And out in darkness with the fisherfolk
We passed and stumbled over mounds of moss,
And heard, but did not see the passing beck.
Ah, graceless heart, would that it could regain
From the dim storehouse of sensations past
The impress full of tender awe, that night,
Which fell on me. It was as if the Christ
Had been drawn down from heaven to track us home,
And any of the footsteps following us
Might have been His.

A WEDDING SONG.

COME up the broad river, the Thames, my Dane,
My Dane with the beautiful eyes!
Thousands and thousands await thee full fain,
And talk of the wind and the skies.
Fear not from folk and from country to part,
O, I swear it is wisely done:
For (I said) I will bear me by thee, sweetheart,
As becometh my father's son."

Great London was shouting as I went down.
"She is worthy," I said, "of this;
What shall I give who have promised a crown?
O, first, I will give her a kiss."
So I kissed her and brought her, my Dane, my Dane,
Through the waving wonderful crowd:
Thousands and thousands, they shouted amain,
Like mighty thunders and loud.

And they said, "He is young, the lad we love,
The heir of the Isles is young:
How we deem of his mother, and one gone above,
Can neither be said nor sung.

He brings us a pledge — he will do his part
With the best of his race and name;" —
And I will, for I look to live, sweetheart,
As may suit with my mother's fame.

THE FOUR BRIDGES.

I LOVE this gray old church, the low, long nave,
The ivied chancel and the slender spire;
No less its shadow on each heaving grave,
With growing osier bound, or living brier;
I love those yew-tree trunks, where stand arrayed
So many a deep-cut name of youth and maid.

A simple custom this — I love it well —
A carved betrothal and a pledge of truth;
How many an eve, their linkèd names to spell,
Beneath the yew-trees sat our village youth
When work was over, and the new-cut hay
Sent wafts of balm from meadows where it lay.

Ah! many an eve, while I was yet a boy,
Some village hind has beckoned me aside,
And sought mine aid, with shy and awkward joy,
To carve the letters of his rustic bride,
And make them clear to read as graven stone,
Deep in the yew-tree's trunk beside his own.

For none could carve like me, and here they stand,
Fathers and mothers of this present race;
And underscored by some less practised hand,
That fain the story of its line would trace,
With children's names, and number, and the day
When any called to God have passed away.

I look upon them, and I turn aside,
As oft when carving them I did erewhile;
And there I see those wooden bridges wide
That cross the marshy hollow; there the stile
In reeds embedded, and the swelling down,
And the white road towards the distant town.

But those old bridges claim another look.
Our brattling river tumbles through the one;
The second spans a shallow, weedy brook:
Beneath the others, and beneath the sun,
Lie two long stilly pools, and on their breasts
Picture their wooden piles, encased in swallows' nests.

And round about them grows a fringe of reeds,
And then a floating crown of lily flowers,
And yet within small silver-budded weeds;
But each clear centre evermore embowers
A deeper sky, where, stooping, you may see
The little minnows darting restlessly.

My heart is bitter, lilies, at your sweet;
Why did the dewdrop fringe your chalices?

Why in your beauty are you thus complete,
You silver ships — you floating palaces?
O! if need be, you must allure man's eye,
Yet wherefore blossom here? O why? O why?

O! O! the world is wide, you lily flowers,
It hath warm forests, cleft by stilly pools,
Where every night bathe crowds of stars; and bowers
Of spicery hang over. Sweet air cools
And shakes the lilies among those stars that lie,
Why are not ye content to reign there? Why?

That chain of bridges, it were hard to tell
How it is linked with all my early joy.
There was a little foot that I loved well,
It danced across them when I was a boy;
There was a careless voice that used to sing;
There was a child, a sweet and happy thing.

Oft through that matted wood of oak and birch
She came from yonder house upon the hill;
She crossed the wooden bridges to the church,
And watched, with village girls, my boasted skill
But loved to watch the floating lilies best,
Or linger, peering in a swallow's nest;

Linger, and linger, with her wistful eyes
Drawn to the lily-buds that lay so warm
And soft on crimson water; for the skies
Would crimson, and the little cloudlets calm

Would all be flung among the flowers sheer down,
To flush the spaces of their clustering crown.

Till the green rushes — O, so glossy green —
The rushes, they would whisper, rustle, shake;
And forth on floating gauze, no jewelled Queen
So rich, the green-eyed dragon-flies would break,
And hover on the flowers — most aërial things,
With little rainbows flickering on their wings.

Ah! my heart dear! the polished pools lie still,
Like lanes of water reddened by the west,
Till swooping down from yon o'erhanging hill,
The bold marsh-harrier wets her tawny breast;
We scared her oft in childhood from her prey,
And the old eager thoughts rise fresh as yesterday.

To yonder copse by moonlight I did go,
In luxury of mischief, half afraid,
To steal the great owl's brood, her downy snow,
Her screaming imps to seize, the while she preyed
With yellow, cruel eyes, whose radiant glare,
Fell with their mother rage, I might not dare.

Panting, I lay till her great fanning wings
Troubled the dreams of rock-doves, slumbering nigh,
And she and her fierce mate, like evil things,
Skimmed the dusk fields; then rising with a cry
Of fear, joy, triumph, darted on my prey,
And tore it from the nest and fled away.

But afterward, belated in the wood,
I saw her moping on the rifled tree,
And my heart smote me for her, while I stood
Awakened from my careless reverie;
So white she looked, with moonlight round her shed,
So motherlike, she drooped and hung her head.

O! that mine eyes would cheat me. I behold
The godwits running by the water edge,
The mossy bridges mirrored as of old;
The little curlews creeping from the sedge,
But not the little foot so gayly light —
O that mine eyes would cheat me! that I might.

Would cheat me! I behold the gable ends —
Those purple pigeons clustering on the cote;
The lane with maples overhung, that bends
Toward her dwelling; the dry grassy moat,
Thick mullions, diamond-latticed, mossed and gray,
And walls banked up with laurel and with bay.

And up behind them yellow fields of corn,
And still ascending countless firry spires,
Dry slopes of hills uncultured, bare, forlorn,
And green in rocky clefts with whins and briers;
Then rich cloud masses dyed the violet's hue,
With orange sunbeams dropping swiftly through.

Ay, I behold all this full easily;
My soul is jealous of my happier eyes,

And manhood envies youth. Ah, strange to see,
By looking merely, orange-flooded skies;
Nay, any dew-drop that may near me shine:
But never more the face of Eglantine.

She was my one companion, being herself
The jewel and adornment of my days,
My life's completeness. O, a smiling elf,
That I do but disparage with my praise.
My playmate; and I loved her dearly and long,
And she loved me, as the tender love the strong.

Ay, but she grew, till on a time there came
A sudden restless yearning to my heart;
And as we went a-nesting, all for shame
And shyness, I did hold my peace, and start;
Content departed, comfort shut me out,
And there was nothing left to talk about.

She had but sixteen years, and as for me,
Four added made my life. This pretty bird,
This fairy bird that I had cherished — she,
Content, had sung, while I, contented, heard
The song had ceased; the bird with nature's art
Had brought a thorn and set it in my heart.

The restless birth of love my soul opprest,
I longed and wrestled for a tranquil day,
And warred with that disquiet in my breast
As one who knows there is a better way;

But turned against myself, I still in vain
Looked for the ancient calm to come again

My tired soul could to itself confess
That she deserved a wiser love than mine;
To love more truly were to love her less,
And for this truth I still awoke to pine;
I had a dim belief that it would be
A better thing for her, a blessed thing for me.

Good hast Thou made them — comforters right sweet;
Good hast Thou made the world, to mankind lent;
Good are Thy dropping clouds that feed the wheat;
Good are Thy stars above the firmament.
Take to Thee, take, Thy worship, Thy renown;
The good which Thou hast made doth wear Thy crown.

For, O my God, thy creatures are so frail,
Thy bountiful creation is so fair,
That, drawn before us like the temple veil,
It hides the Holy Place from thought and care,
Giving man's eyes instead its sweeping fold,
Rich as with cherub wings and apples wrought of gold.

Purple and blue and scarlet — shimmering bells
And rare pomegranates on its broidered rim,
Glorious with chain and fretwork that the swell
Of incense shakes to music dreamy and dim,

Till on a day comes loss, that God makes gain,
And death and darkness rend the veil in twain.

. . . . . .

Ah, sweetest! my beloved! each outward thing
Recalls my youth, and is instinct with thee;
Brown wood-owls in the dusk, with noiseless wing,
Float from yon hanger to their haunted tree,
And hoot full softly. Listening, I regain
A flashing thought of thee with their remembered strain.

I will not pine — it is the careless brook,
These amber sunbeams slanting down the vale;
It is the long tree-shadows, with their look
Of natural peace, that make my heart to fail
The peace of nature — No, I will not pine —
But O, the contrast 'twixt her face and mine!

And still I changed — I was a boy no more;
My heart was large enough to hold my kind;
And all the world. As hath been oft before
With youth, I sought, but I could never find
Work hard enough to quiet my self-strife
And use the strength of action-craving life.

She, too, was changed: her bountiful sweet eyes
Looked out full lovingly on all the world.
O, tender as the deeps in yonder skies
Their beaming! but her rosebud lips were curled

With the soft dimple of a musing smile,
Which kept my gaze, but held me mute the while.

A cast of bees, a slowly moving wain,
The scent of bean-flowers wafted up a dell,
Blue pigeons wheeling over fields of grain,
Or bleat of folded lamb, would please her well
Or cooing of the early coted dove; —
She sauntering mused of these; I, following, mused of love.

With her two lips, that one the other pressed
So poutingly with such a tranquil air,
With her two eyes, that on my own would rest
So dream-like, she denied my silent prayer,
Fronted unuttered words and said them nay,
And smiled down love till it had nought to say.

The words that through mine eyes would clearly shine
Hovered and hovered on my lips in vain;
If after pause I said but "Eglantine,"
She raised to me her quiet eyelids twain,
And looked me this reply — look calm, yet bland —
"I shall not know, I will not understand."

Yet she did know my story — knew my life
Was wrought to hers with bindings many and strong —
That I, like Israel, servèd for a wife,
And for the love I bare her thought not long,

But only a few days, full quickly told,
My seven years' service strict as his of old.

I must be brief: the twilight shadows grow,
And steal the rose-bloom genial summer sheds,
And scented wafts of wind that come and go
Have lifted dew from honeyed clover-heads;
The seven stars shine out above the mill,
The dark delightsome woods lie veiled and still.

Hush! hush! the nightingale begins to sing,
And stops, as ill-contented with her note;
Then breaks from out the bush with hurried wing,
Restless and passionate. She tunes her throat,
Laments awhile in wavering trills, and then
Floods with a stream of sweetness all the glen.

The seven stars upon the nearest pool
Lie trembling down betwixt the lily leaves,
And move like glowworms; wafting breezes cool
Come down along the water, and it heaves
And bubbles in the sedge; while deep and wide
The dim night settles on the country side.

I know this scene by heart. O! once before
I saw the seven stars float to and fro,
And stayed my hurried footsteps by the shore
To mark the starry picture spread below:
Its silence made the tumult in my breast
More audible; its peace revealed my own unrest.

I paused, then hurried on; my heart beat quick;
I crossed the bridges, reached the steep ascent,
And climbed through matted fern and hazels thick;
Then darkling through the close green maples went,
And saw — there felt love's keenest pangs begin —
An oriel window lighted from within —

I saw — and felt that they were scarcely cares
Which I had known before; I drew more near,
And O! methought how sore it frets and wears
The soul to part with that it holds so dear;
'Tis hard two woven tendrils to untwine,
And I was come to part with Eglantine.

For life was bitter through those words repressed,
And youth was burdened with unspoken vows;
Love unrequited brooded in my breast,
And shrank, at glance, from the belovèd brows:
And three long months, heart-sick, my foot withdrawn,
I had not sought her side by rivulet, copse, or lawn —

Not sought her side, yet busy thought no less
Still followed in her wake, though far behind;
And I, being parted from her loveliness,
Looked at the picture of her in my mind:
I lived alone, I walked with soul oppressed,
And ever sighed for her, and sighed for rest.

Then I had risen to struggle with my heart,
And said — "O heart! the world is fresh and fair,

And I am young; but this thy restless smart
Changes to bitterness the morning air:
I will, I must, these weary fetters break —
I will be free, if only for her sake.

"O let me trouble her no more with sighs!
Heart-healing comes by distance, and with time:
Then let me wander, and enrich mine eyes
With the green forests of a softer clime,
Or list by night at sea the wind's low stave
And long monotonous rockings of the wave.

"Through open solitudes, unbounded meads,
Where, wading on breast-high in yellow bloom,
Untamed of man, the shy white lama feeds —
There would I journey and forget my doom;
Or far, O far as sunrise I would see
The level prairie stretch away from me!

"Or I would sail upon the tropic seas,
Where fathom long the blood-red dulses grow,
Droop from the rock and waver in the breeze,
Lashing the tide to foam; while calm below
The muddy mandrakes throng those waters warm,
And purple, gold, and green, the living blossoms swarm."

So of my father I did win consent,
With importunities repeated long,
To make that duty which had been my bent,
To dig with strangers alien tombs among,

And bound to them through desert leagues to pace,
Or track up rivers to their starting-place.

For this I had done battle and had won,
But not alone to tread Arabian sands,
Measure the shadows of a southern sun,
Or dig out gods in the old Egyptian lands;
But for the dream wherewith I thought to cope —
The grief of love unmated with love's hope.

And now I would set reason in array,
Methought, and fight for freedom manfully,
Till by long absence there would come a day
When this my love would not be pain to me;
But if I knew my rosebud fair and blest
I should not pine to wear it on my breast.

The days fled on; another week should fling
A foreign shadow on my lengthening way;
Another week, yet nearness did not bring
A braver heart that hard farewell to say.
I let the last day wane, the dusk begin,
Ere I had sought that window lighted from within.

Sinking and sinking, O my heart! my heart!
Will absence heal thee whom its shade doth rend?
I reached the little gate, and soft within
The oriel fell her shadow. She did lend

Her loveliness to me, and let me share
The listless sweetness of those features fair.

Among thick laurels in the gathering gloom,
Heavy for this our parting, I did stand;
Beside her mother in the lighted room
She sitting leaned her cheek upon her hand;
And as she read, her sweet voice, floating through
The open casement, seemed to mourn me an adieu.

Youth! youth! how buoyant are thy hopes: they turn
Like marigolds toward the sunny side.
My hopes were buried in a funeral urn,
And they sprung up like plants and spread them wide;
Though I had schooled and reasoned them away,
They gathered smiling near and prayed a holiday.

Ah, sweetest voice! how pensive were its tones,
And how regretful its unconscious pause!
"Is it for me her heart this sadness owns,
And is our parting of to-night the cause?
Ah, would it might be so!" I thought, and stood
Listening entranced among the underwood.

I thought it would be something worth the pain
Of parting, to look once in those deep eyes,
And take from them an answering look again.
"When eastern palms," I thought, "about me rise,

If I might carve our names upon the rind,
Betrothed, I would not mourn, though leaving thee behind."

I can be patient, faithful, and most fond
To unacknowledged love; I can be true
To this sweet thraldom, this unequal bond,
This yoke of mine that reaches not to you:
O, how much more could costly parting buy,
If not a pledge, one kiss, or, failing that, a sigh!

I listened, and she ceased to read; she turned
Her face towards the laurels where I stood:
Her mother spoke — O wonder! hardly learned;
She said, "There is a rustling in the wood;
Ah, child! if one draw near to bid farewell,
Let not thine eyes an unsought secret tell.

"My daughter, there is nothing held so dear
As love, if only it be hard to win.
The roses that in yonder hedge appear
Outdo our garden-buds which bloom within;
But since the hand may pluck them every day,
Unmarked they bud, bloom, drop, and drift away.

"My daughter, my belovèd, be not you
Like those same roses." O bewildering word!
My heart stood still, a mist obscured my view:
It cleared; still silence. No denial stirred

The lips beloved ; but straight as one opprest,
She kneeling dropped her face upon her mother's
breast.

This said, " My daughter, sorrow comes to all ;
Our life is checked with shadows manifold :.
But woman has this more — she may not call
Her sorrow by its name. Yet love not told,
And only born of absence and by thought,
With thought and absence may return to nought."

And my beloved lifted up her face,
And moved her lips as if about to speak ;
She dropped her lashes with a girlish grace,
And the rich damask mantled in her cheek :
I stood awaiting till she should deny
Her love, or with sweet laughter put it by.

But closer nestling to her mother's heart,
She, blushing, said no word to break my trance,
For I was breathless ; and with lips apart
Felt my breast pant and all my pulses dance,
And strove to move, but could not for the weight
Of unbelieving joy, so sudden and so great,

Because she loved me. With a mighty sigh,
Breaking away, I left her on her knees,
And blest the laurel bower, the darkened sky,
The sultry night of August. Through the trees,

Giddy with gladness, to the porch I went,
And hardly found the way for joyful wonderment.

Yet when I entered, saw her mother sit
With both hands cherishing the graceful head,
Smoothing the clustered hair, and parting it
From the fair brow; she, rising, only said,
In the accustom'd tone, the accustom'd word,
The careless greeting that I always heard;

And she resumed her merry mocking smile,
Though tear-drops on the glistening lashes hung.
O woman! thou wert fashioned to beguile:
So have all sages said, all poets sung.
She spoke of favoring winds and waiting ships,
With smiles of gratulation on her lips!

And then she looked and faltered: I had grown
So suddenly in life and soul a man.
She moved her lips, but could not find a tone
To set her mocking music to; began
One struggle for dominion, raised her eyes,
And straight withdrew them bashful through surprise.

The color over cheek and bosom flushed;
I might have heard the beating of her heart,
But that mine own beat louder; when she blushed,
The hand within mine own I felt to start,
But would not change my pitiless decree
To strive with her for might and mastery.

She looked again, as one that, half afraid,
Would fain be certain of a doubtful thing;
Or one beseeching — "Do not me upbraid!"
And then she trembled like the fluttering
Of timid little birds, and silent stood,
No smile wherewith to mock my hardihood.

She turned, and to an open casement moved
With girlish shyness, mute beneath my gaze,
And I on downcast lashes unreproved
Could look as long as pleased me; while, the rays
Of moonlight round her, she her fair head bent,
In modest silence to my words attent.

How fast the giddy whirling moments flew!
The moon had set; I heard the midnight chime;
Hope is more brave than fear, and joy than dread,
And I could wait unmoved the parting time.
It came; for, by a sudden impulse drawn,
She, risen, stepped out upon the dusky lawn.

A little waxen taper in her hand,
Her feet upon the dry and dewless grass,
She looked like one of the celestial band,
Only that on her cheeks did dawn and pass
Most human blushes; while, the soft light thrown
On vesture pure and white, she seemed yet fairer grown.

Her mother, looking out toward her, sighed,
Then gave her hand in token of farewell,

And with her warning eyes, that seemed to chide,
Scarce suffered that I sought her child, to tell
The story of my life, whose every line
No other burden bore than — Eglantine.

Black thunder-clouds were rising up behind,
The waxen taper burned full steadily;
It seemed as if dark midnight had a mind
To hear what lovers say, and her decree
Had passed for silence, while she, dropped to ground
With raiment floating wide, drank in the sound.

O happiness! thou dost not leave a trace
So well defined as sorrow. Amber light,
Shed like a glory on her angel face,
I can remember fully, and the sight
Of her fair forehead and her shining eyes,
And lips that smiled in sweet and girlish wise.

I can remember how the taper played
Over her small hands, and her vesture white;
How it struck up into the trees, and laid
Upon their under leaves unwonted light;
And when she held it low, how far it spread
O'er velvet pansies slumbering on their bed.

I can remember that we spoke full low,
That neither doubted of the other's truth;
And that with footsteps slower and more slow,

Hands folded close for love, eyes wet for ruth:
Beneath the trees, by that clear taper's flame,
We wandered till the gate of parting came.

But I forget the parting words she said,
So much they thrilled the all-attentive soul;
For one short moment human heart and head
May bear such bliss — its present is the whole:
I had that present, till in whispers fell
With parting gesture her subdued farewell.

Farewell! she said, in act to turn away,
But stood a moment still to dry her tears,
And suffered my enfolding arm to stay
The time of her departure. O ye years!
That intervene betwixt that day and this,
You all received your hue from that keen pain and bliss.

O mingled pain and bliss! O pain to break
At once from happiness so lately found,
And four long years to feel for her sweet sake
The incompleteness of all sight and sound!
But bliss to cross once more the foaming brine —
O bliss, to come again, and make her mine!

I cannot — O, I cannot more recall!
But I will soothe my troubled thoughts to rest
With musing over journeyings wide, and all
Observance of this active humored west,

And swarming cities steeped in eastern day,
With swarthy tribes in gold and striped array.

I turn away from these, and straight arise
(Shifting and changing at the restless will);
Imbedded in some deep Circassian mead,
White wagon-tilts, and flocks that eat their fill
Unseen above, while comely shepherds pass,
And scarcely show their heads above the grass.

— The red Sahara in an angry glow,
With amber fogs, across its hollows trailed
Long strings of camels, gloomy-eyed and slow,
And women on their necks from gazers veiled,
And sun-swart guides who toil across the sand
To groves of date-trees on the watered land.

Again — the brown sails of an Arab boat,
Flapping by night upon a glassy sea,
Whereon the moon and planets seem to float,
More bright of hue than they were wont to be,
While shooting-stars rain down with crackling sound,
And, thick as swarming locusts, drop to ground.

Or far into the heat among the sands
The gembok nations, snuffing up the wind,
Drawn by the scent of water — and the bands
Of tawny-bearded lions pacing, blind
With the sun-dazzle in their midst, opprest
With prey, and spiritless for lack of rest!

What more? Old Lebanon, the frosty-browed,
Setting his feet among oil-olive trees,
Heaving his bare brown shoulder through a cloud,
And after, grassy Carmel, purple seas,
Flattering his dreams and echoing in his rocks,
To multiply the bleating of his flocks.

Enough: how vain this thinking to beguile,
With recollected scenes, an aching breast!
Did not I, journeying, muse on her the while?
Ah, yes! for every landscape comes impressed —
Ay, written on, as by an iron pen,
With the same thought I nursed about her then.

Therefore let memory turn again to home;
Feel, as of old, the joy of drawing near;
Watch the green breakers and the wind-tossed foam,
And see the land-fog break, dissolve, and clear;
Then think a skylark's voice far sweeter sound
Than ever thrilled, but over English ground.

And walk, glad, even to tears, among the wheat,
Not doubting this to be the first of lands;
And while in foreign words this murmuring, meet
Some little village school-girls (with their hands
Full of forget-me-nots), who, greeting me,
I count their English talk delightsome melody.

And seat me on a bank, and draw them near,
That I may feast myself with hearing it,

Till shortly they forget their bashful fear,
Push back their flaxen curls, and round me sit —
Tell me their names, their daily tasks, and show
Where wild wood-strawberries in the copses grow.

So passed the day in this delightful land:
My heart was thankful for the English tongue —
For English sky with feathery cloudlets spanned —
For English hedge with glistening dewdrops hung.
I journeyed, and at glowing eventide
Stopped at a rustic inn by the wayside.

That night I slumbered sweetly, being right glad
To miss the flapping of the shrouds; but lo!
A quiet dream of beings twain I had,
Behind the curtain talking soft and low:
Methought I did not heed their utterance fine,
Till one of them said, softly, "Eglantine."

I started up awake, 'twas silence all:
My own fond heart had shaped that utterance clear;
And "ah!" methought, "how sweetly did it fall,
Though but in dream, upon the listening ear!
How sweet from other lips the name well known —
That name, so many a year heard only from mine own."

I thought awhile, then slumber came to me,
And tangled all my fancy in her maze,
And I was drifting on a raft at sea,

The near all ocean, and the far all haze;
Through the white polished water sharks did glide,
And up in heaven I saw no stars to guide.

"Have mercy, God!" but lo! my raft uprose;
Drip, drip, I heard the water splash from her;
My raft had wings, and as the petrel goes,
She skimmed the sea, then brooding seemed to sit
The milk-white mirror, till, with sudden spring,
She flew straight upward like a living thing,

But strange! — I went not with her in her flight,
For I was entering at a cavern's mouth;
Trees grew within, and screaming birds of night
Sat on them, hiding from the torrid south.
On, on I went, while gleaming in the dark
Those trees with blanchèd leaves stood pale and stark.

The trees had flower-buds, nourished in deep night,
And suddenly, as I went farther in,
They opened, and they shot out lambent light;
Then all at once arose a railing din
That frighted me: "It is the ghosts," I said,
"And they are railing for their darkness fled."

"I hope they will not look me in the face;
It frighteth me to hear their laughter loud;"
I saw them troop before with jaunty pace,
And one would shake off dust that soiled her shroud:

But now, O joy! unhoped to calm my dread,
Some moonlight filtered through a cleft o'erhead.

I climbed the lofty trees — the blanchèd trees —
The cleft was wide enough to let me through;
I clambered out and felt the balmy breeze,
And stepped on churchyard grasses wet with dew.
O happy chance! O fortune to admire!
I stood beside my own loved village spire.

And as I gazed upon the yew-tree's trunk,
Lo, far-off music — music in the night!
So sweet and tender as it swelled and sunk;
It charmed me till I wept with keen delight,
And in my dream, methought as it drew near
The very clouds in heaven stooped low to hear.

Beat high, beat low, wild heart so deeply stirred,
For high as heaven runs up the piercing strain;
The restless music fluttering like a bird
Bemoaned herself, and dropped to earth again,
Heaping up sweetness till I was afraid
That I should die of grief when it did fade.

And it DID fade; but while with eager ear
I drank its last long echo dying away,
I was aware of footsteps that drew near,
And round the ivied chancel seemed to stray;
O soft above the hallowed place they trod —
Soft as the fall of foot that is not shod!

I turned — 'twas even so — yes, Eglantine!
For at the first I had divined the same;
I saw the moon on her shut eyelids shine,
And said, "She is asleep:" still on she came;
Then, on her dimpled feet, I saw it gleam,
And thought — "I know that this is but a dream."

My darling! O my darling! not the less
My dream went on because I knew it such;
She came towards me in her loveliness —
A thing too pure, methought, for mortal touch;
The rippling gold did on her bosom meet,
The long white robe descended to her feet.

The fringèd lids dropped low, as sleep-oppressed;
Her dreamy smile was very fair to see,
And her two hands were folded to her breast,
With somewhat held between them heedfully.
O fast asleep! and yet methought she knew
And felt my nearness those shut eyelids through.

She sighed: my tears ran down for tenderness —
"And have I drawn thee to me in my sleep?
Is it for me thou wanderest shelterless,
Wetting thy steps in dewy grasses deep?
O if this be!" I said — "yet speak to me;
I blame my very dream for cruelty."

Then from her stainless bosom she did take
Two beauteous lily flowers that lay therein,

And with slow moving lips a gesture make,
As one that some forgotten words doth win:
"They floated on the pool," methought she said,
And water trickled from each lily's head.

It dropped upon her feet — I saw it gleam
Along the ripples of her yellow hair,
And stood apart, for only in a dream
She would have come, methought, to meet me there.
She spoke again — "Ah fair! ah fresh they shine!
And there are many left, and these are mine."

I answered her with flattering accents meet —
"Love, they are whitest lilies e'er were blown."
"And sayest thou so?" she sighed in murmurs sweet,
"I have nought else to give thee now, mine own!
For it is night. Then take them, love!" said she,
"They have been costly flowers to thee — and me."

While thus she said I took them from her hand,
And, overcome with love and nearness, woke;
And overcome with ruth that she should stand
Barefooted in the grass; that when she spoke,
Her mystic words should take so sweet a tone,
And of all names her lips should choose "My own."

I rose, I journeyed, neared my home, and soon
Beheld the spire peer out above the hill:
It was a sunny harvest afternoon,
When by the churchyard wicket, standing still,

I cast my eager eyes abroad to know
If change had touched the scenes of long ago.

I looked across the hollow; sunbeams shone
Upon the old house with the gable ends:
"Save that the laurel trees are taller grown,
No change," methought, "to its gray wall extends.
What clear bright beams on yonder lattice shine!
There did I sometime talk with Eglantine."

There standing with my very goal in sight,
Over my haste did sudden quiet steal;
I thought to dally with my own delight,
Nor rush on headlong to my garnered weal,
But taste the sweetness of a short delay,
And for a little moment hold the bliss at bay.

The church was open; it perchance might be
That there to offer thanks I might essay,
Or rather, as I think, that I might see
The place where Eglantine was wont to pray.
But so it was; I crossed that portal wide,
And felt my riot joy to calm subside.

The low depending curtains gently swayed,
Cast over arch and roof a crimson glow;
But, ne'ertheless, all silence and all shade
It seemed, save only for the rippling flow
Of their long foldings, when the sunset air
Sighed through the casements of the house of prayer.

I found her place, the ancient oaken stall,
Where in her childhood I had seen her sit,
Most saint-like and most tranquil there of all,
Folding her hands, as if a dreaming fit —
A heavenly vision had before her strayed
Of the Eternal Child in lowly manger laid.

I saw her prayer-book laid upon the seat,
And took it in my hand, and felt more near
In fancy to her, finding it most sweet
To think how very oft, low kneeling there
In her devout thoughts, she had let me share,
And set my graceless name in her pure prayer.

My eyes were dazzled with delightful tears —
In sooth, they were the last I ever shed;
For with them fell the cherished dreams of years.
I looked, and on the wall above my head,
Over her seat, there was a tablet placed,
With one word only on the marble traced.

Ah, well! I would not overstate that woe,
For I have had some blessings, little care;
But since the falling of that heavy blow,
God's earth has never seemed to me so fair;
Nor any of his creatures so divine,
Nor sleep so sweet; — the word was — EGLANTINE

A MOTHER SHOWING THE PORTRAIT OF HER CHILD.

(F. M. L.)

IVING CHILD or pictured cherub,
Ne'er o'ermatched its baby grace;
And the mother, moving nearer,
Looked it calmly in the face;
Then with slight and quiet gesture,
And with lips that scarcely smiled,
Said — "A Portrait of my daughter
When she was a child."

Easy thought was hers to fathom,
Nothing hard her glance to read,
For it seemed to say, "No praises
For this little child I need:
If you see, I see far better,
And I will not feign to care
For a stranger's prompt assurance
That the face is fair."

Softly clasped and half extended,
She her dimpled hands doth lay,
So they doubtless placed them, saying —
"Little one, you must not play."
And while yet his work was growing,
This the painter's hand hath shown,
That the little heart was making
Pictures of its own.

Is it warm in that green valley,
Vale of childhood, where you dwell?
Is it calm in that green valley,
Round whose bournes such great hills swell?
Are there giants in the valley —
Giants leaving footprints yet?
Are there angels in the valley?
Tell me — I forget.

Answer, answer, for the lilies,
Little one, o'ertop you much,
And the mealy gold within them
You can scarcely reach to touch
O how far their aspect differs,
Looking up and looking down!
You look up in that green valley —
Valley of renown!

Are there voices in the valley,
Lying near the heavenly gate?

When it opens, do the harp-strings,
Touched within, reverberate?
When, like shooting-stars, the angels
To your couch at nightfall go,
Are their swift wings heard to rustle?
Tell me! for you know.

Yes, you know; and you are silent,
Not a word shall asking win;
Little mouth more sweet than rosebud,
Fast it locks the secret in.
Not a glimpse upon your present
You unfold to glad my view;
Ah, what secrets of your future
I could tell to you!

Sunny present! thus I read it,
By remembrance of my past,
Its to-day and its to-morrow
Are as lifetimes vague and vast;
And each face in that green valley
Takes for you an aspect mild,
And each voice grows soft in saying —
"Kiss me, little child!"

As a boon the kiss is granted,
Baby mouth, your touch is sweet,
Takes the love without the trouble
From those lips that with it meet;

Gives the love, O pure! O tender!
Of the valley where it grows,
But the baby heart receiveth
MORE THAN IT BESTOWS.

Comes the future to the present —
"Ah!" she saith, "too blithe of mood;
Why that smile which seems to whisper —
'I am happy, God is good!'
God is good, that truth eternal
Sown for you in happier years,
I must tend it in my shadow,
Water it with tears.

"Ah, sweet present! I must lead thee
By a daylight more subdued;
There must teach thee low to whisper —
'I am mournful, God is good!'
Peace thou future, clouds are coming,
Stooping from the mountain's crest,
But that sunshine floods the valley:
Let her — let her rest.

Comes the future to the present,
"Child," she saith, "and wilt thou rest?
How long, child, before thy footsteps
Fret to reach yon cloudy crest?
Ah, the valley! — angels guard it,
But the heights are brave to see;

Looking down were long contentment ·
Come up, child, to me."

So she speaks, but do not heed her
Little maid, with wondrous eyes,
Not afraid, but clear and tender,
Blue, and filled with prophecies;
Thou for whom life's veil unlifted
Hangs, whom warmest valleys fold,
Lift the veil, the charm dissolveth,
Climb, but heights are cold.

There are buds that fold within them,
Closed and covered from our sight,
Many a richly tinted petal,
Never looked on by the light,
Fain to see their shrouded faces,
Sun and dew are long at strife,
Till at length the sweet buds open —
Such a bud is life.

When the rose of thine own being
Shall reveal its central fold,
Thou shalt look within and marvel,
Fearing what thine eyes behold;
What it shows and what it teaches
Are not things wherewith to part;
Thorny rose! that always costeth
Beatings at the heart.

Look in fear, for there is dimness,
Ills unshapen float anigh;
Look in awe, for this same nature
Once the Godhead deigned to die.
Look in love, for He doth love it,
And its tale is best of lore,
Still humanity grows dearer,
Being learned the more.

Learn, but not the less bethink thee
How that all can mingle tears;
But his joy can none discover,
Save to them that are his peers.
And that they whose lips do utter
Language such as bards have sung
Lo! their speech shall be to many
As an unknown tongue.

Learn, that if to thee the meaning
Of all other eyes be shown,
Fewer eyes can ever front thee,
That are skilled to read thine own.
And that if thy love's deep current
Many another's far outflows,
Then thy heart must take forever,
LESS THAN IT BESTOWS.

STRIFE AND PEACE.

(Written for The Portfolio Society, October 1861.)

THE yellow poplar-leaves came down
And like a carpet lay,
No waftings were in the sunny air
To flutter them away;
And he stepped on blithe and debonair
That warm October day.

"The boy," saith he, "hath got his own,
But sore has been the fight,
For ere his life began the strife
That ceased but yesternight;
For the will," he said, "the kinsfolk read,
And read it not aright.

"His cause was argued in the court
Before his christening day;
And counsel was heard, and judge demurr'd,
And bitter waxed the fray;
Brother with brother spake no word
When they met in the way.

"Against each one did each contend,
And all against the heir,

I would not bend, for I knew the end —
I have it for my share,
And nought repent, though my first friend
From henceforth I must spare.

"Manor and moor and farm and wold
Their greed begrudged him sore,
And parchments old with passionate hold
They guarded heretofore;
And they carped at signature and seal,
But they may carp no more.

"An old affront will stir the heart
Through years of rankling pain;
And I feel the fret that urged me yet
That warfare to maintain;
For an enemy's loss may well be set
Above an infant's gain.

"An enemy's loss I go to prove;
Laugh out, thou little heir!
Laugh in his face who vowed to chase
Thee from thy birthright fair;
For I come to set thee in thy place:
Laugh out, and do not spare."

A man of strife, in wrathful mood
He neared the nurse's door;
With poplar-leaves the roof and eaves
Were thickly scatter'd o'er,

And yellow as they a sunbeam lay
Along the cottage-floor.

"Sleep on, thou pretty, pretty lamb,"
He hears the fond nurse say;
"And if angels stand at thy right hand,
As now belike they may,
And if angels meet at thy bed's feet,
I fear them not this day.

"Come wealth, come want to thee, dear heart,
It was all one to me,
For thy pretty tongue far sweeter rung
Than coinèd gold and fee;
And ever the while thy waking smile,
It was right fair to see.

"Sleep, pretty bairn, and never know
Who grudged and who transgressed;
Thee to retain I was full fain,
But God He knoweth best!
And His peace upon thy brow lies plain
As the sunshine on thy breast!"

The man of strife, he enters in,
Looks, and his pride doth cease;
Anger and sorrow shall be to-morrow
Trouble, and no release;
But the babe whose life awoke the strife
Hath entered into peace.

No. 143 Washington Street,
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